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THE TRIUMPH OF THE CATHOLIC COMMITTEE:

The Irish Catholic Campaign, 1790 – 1793

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ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this study is to reawaken interest in the frequently overlooked and misunderstood popular political campaign of the Irish Catholic Committee between 1790 and 1793. The first chapter of this thesis will provide a broad overview and an introduction and will also present the primary topics to be addressed, including the membership, motivation, methodology, and character of the Irish Catholic organisation. The second chapter will relate the historical background of the penal era in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Ireland and the evolution of Irish Catholic activism in the decades immediately prior to the 1790s. Chapters three, four, five, and six will be devoted to relating the actual events of the campaign in detail, investigating the contribution of specific members and outlining the adoption of innovative tactics and measures. Chapter three will cover the campaign's gradual and hesitant beginnings, while chapters four and five will describe the critical months between September 1791 and December 1792, when the Committee was at its most politically active. Chapter six will cover the events of 1793, when the Catholics of Ireland received the parliamentary franchise, and will consider the historical legacy of the Catholic Relief Act of 1793. Finally, the last chapter of this thesis, chapter seven, will provide a thorough analysis of the character of the Catholic Committee, asking whether the Committee can most accurately be characterised as either a sectarian, radical, or patriotic political organisation.

One of the intended aims of this dissertation is the effective reintroduction of the Catholic Committee to eighteenth-century Irish historiography, placing it alongside other contemporary popular political groups such as the Society of United Irishmen. In addition, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the important rediscovery of the voice

of the secular, eighteenth-century Irish Catholics, which has repeatedly been neglected or underappreciated by historians investigating the political events surrounding the Irish Catholic question of the eighteenth century. Finally, this dissertation will show that the campaign of the Irish Catholic Committee was conducted peacefully, without social bias or religious prejudice, for the relief of the Irish Catholics and the improvement of Irish society.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Although there have been many diverse and varied experiences in the history of Ireland, certain specific viewpoints have traditionally dominated Irish historiography. Many modern political historians have been influenced by the events of the twentieth century and, subsequently, have focused their attention on the evolution of Irish nationalism or the growth of Ulster unionism, looking backwards to explain current conditions in Ireland. Moreover, as an unintended outcome of this approach to Irish history, a climate of opinion has developed in which political historians are encouraged to depict Irish society and politics in the late eighteenth century as deeply polarised. The more extreme viewpoints of groups such as the United Irishmen and the Protestant Ascendancy have been prioritised, overwhelming eighteenth-century Irish historiography and frequently relegating more moderate Irish voices to a subordinate position.

Furthermore, in studies of late eighteenth-century Ireland, this phenomenon has been compounded by a traditional fascination with the dramatic, revolutionary United Irish uprising of 1798. This event was commemorated and popularised in 1898 during centennial anniversary celebrations held to help promote the political aims of Irish politicians seeking the return of Home Rule to Ireland. Following the more recent bicentennial anniversary of this radical uprising, which occurred nine years ago in 1998, over four-hundred new historical works on the event have appeared in print.¹

Through my research for this dissertation, I have sought to address these imbalances by drawing attention to the under-appreciated, but equally important

¹ For example, see the list in the Royal Historical Society's Bibliography of British History, which is available online at <http://www.rhs.ac.uk/bibl/accesspoint.asp>.

political efforts of Irish Catholic moderates in the eighteenth century. By investigating an alternative approach to history I have sought to uncover a neglected aspect of Irish society and to fill the gap existing between the extreme opinions of polarised radicals and conservatives. Moreover, my work is relevant for the present generation because it highlights the historical contributions of Irish Catholic political activists and demonstrates the rising wealth and significance of the Irish Catholic middle classes at the end of the eighteenth century, groups which applied their newly found political influence to social advocacy and the secular pursuit of civil equality.

For several decades, social historians have been successful in shedding light on the complex interactions between the diverse communities of eighteenth-century Ireland. In particular, a far more comprehensive and accurate description of an Irish Catholic middle class has emerged, a law-abiding group which frequently withstood penal restrictions to preserve Catholic families and to build economic prosperity through personal connections and extensive international trade. Maureen Wall, Patrick Corish, Louis Cullen, T. P. Power, Kevin Whelan, Marianne Elliott, and Karen J. Harvey have all contributed to these important and innovative academic advances.² Unfortunately, however, these developments in Irish social history have been rarely matched by thorough, corresponding considerations of Irish Catholic political participation in the late eighteenth century.

² Maureen Wall, 'The Rise of a Catholic Middle Class in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, xi (1959); Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Dublin: Helicon Limited, 1981); Louis Cullen, 'Catholics under the Penal Laws' *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: iris an da chultúr*, i (1986); T. P. Power, *Land Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Kevin Whelan, 'An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: iris an da chultúr*, x (1995); Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2000); Karen J. Harvey, *The Bellevs of Mount Bellew: A Catholic Gentry Family in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998).

Moreover, despite the appearance of comprehensive biographical studies on certain Irish Catholic clerical leaders, including Archbishop John Thomas Troy,³ few members of the Catholic laity have received satisfactory biographical treatments. With the single exception of an article by J. W. Hammond on Thomas Braughall,⁴ for more than fifty years the political contributions of lay Irish Catholics in the late eighteenth century have been almost entirely overlooked by biographers. In consequence, in most academic journals and professional publications the viewpoints and factors motivating these secular Catholic leaders have been inadequately investigated. Instead, the voices and true sentiments of Irish Catholic popular politicians have been virtually ignored, either buried within more general histories of Ireland or omitted altogether.

By applying some of the important advances of social historians to the arena of popular politics and by exploring the views of these moderate, secular Irish Catholic activists, I intend to discover and clarify their misunderstood motives. In this dissertation I will emphasise the personal contributions made by Irish Catholics to their own struggle for political rights in the late eighteenth century and I will demonstrate how their social concerns and patriotic sympathies encouraged a peaceful pursuit of legislative relief. The ultimate aim of my research is to give back to these popular politicians the same voice that they tried to give to their own people in late eighteenth-century Ireland.

The most important and consistently undervalued Irish Catholic political organisation of the later eighteenth century was the Catholic Committee of Ireland. Despite existing in some form for more than twenty years, the Irish Catholic Committee has generally been misunderstood by many historians and has often been omitted from

³ Vincent J. McNally, *Reform, Revolution and Reaction, Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the Catholic Church in Ireland, 1787-1817* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995).

⁴ J. W. Hammond, 'Thomas Braughall, 1729-1803 Catholic Emancipationist', *Dublin Historical Record*, 14 (1956).

studies of the penal era. In addition to being representative of the social and economic growth of the educated classes of Catholics at the end of the century, the politically moderate Committee assumed the important mantle of social advocacy by acting in defence of the underprivileged, disfranchised, and politically powerless Catholic population of Ireland. Similar to the British activists who called for an end to the trans-Atlantic slave trade during the abolitionist movement of the late eighteenth century, the educated Irish Catholics, who formed and led the Catholic Committee, spoke on a national level on behalf of the voiceless community of their fellow co-religionists.

Ultimately, the political objectives and aims of the Catholic Committee changed over time after exposure to various domestic, British, and international influences. In the 1790s, this culminated in an innovative movement launched by the Committee and replete with novel methods and tactics that focused on peacefully restoring the parliamentary franchise to propertied Catholic freeholders throughout the kingdom. This crucial campaign, however, has suffered from neglect similar to the treatment of eighteenth-century moderates and individual Irish Catholic activists. Partly overshadowed by the dramatic United Irish rebellion at the end of the decade and partly lost between the extremist actions of Irish radicals and conservatives, the Catholic Committee's political campaign between 1790 and 1793 has been undervalued and relegated to the role of an insignificant operation with limited impact on contemporary Irish history, despite contributing to the political reawakening of Catholic Ireland and, ultimately, helping to pave the way for Daniel O'Connell's nineteenth-century struggle for Irish Catholic emancipation.

In rediscovering the political campaign of the Catholic Committee in the 1790s, I have attempted to utilise overlooked primary evidence. Throughout 1791, 1792 and 1793, the Committee published an extensive number of political pamphlets targeting

both Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics in conjunction with its comprehensive scheme to obtain legislative relief and the parliamentary franchise. These pamphlets demonstrate the evolving nature of the Committee, emphasising its changing priorities and highlighting its preoccupation with securing public support. In addition, the surviving correspondence of John Keogh, Richard Burke, and other leading contemporary activists provides personal insights into, and contributes to a clearer understanding of the overall character of the Catholic Committee. Finally, the printed records of speeches delivered by Irish Catholic activists at public assemblies in the 1790s have served as an invaluable resource, providing in-depth portrayals of the opinions, sentiments and concerns of some of the most significant Catholic leaders of the eighteenth century at the height of their political activism. These speeches are preserved in a small number of original, eighteenth-century pamphlets and they afford a unique insight into the campaign of the Catholic Committee.

These primary documents are supported by the extensive secondary research of modern historians and, moreover, are supplemented by eighteenth-century eyewitness accounts and official government records. These government records, which were preserved by British ministers at Westminster and by officials in Dublin Castle, including the Irish Lord Lieutenant and the Chief Secretary, frequently balance out the one-sided views of popular activists, thereby helping to provide a more complete and accurate picture of complex historical events. Similarly, the personal diaries and observations of contemporary eighteenth-century eyewitnesses, such as T. W. Tone, Theobald McKenna, and MPs in the Irish Parliament, complement the Committee's own first-hand accounts and provide a more thorough depiction of the political climate and society of Ireland.

Although current generations of historians may condemn the early attempts of moderate popular politicians in Ireland to maintain peace and social harmony, while simultaneously seeking to alter traditional political and social roles, academics must strive to maintain their objectivity. With the benefit of hindsight, these critics have observed the failure of moderate Catholic organisations, such as the Catholic Committee, to realise their seemingly contradictory goals of achieving full civil equality for the Catholics of Ireland without inciting social disorder. Despite its shortcomings, however, the Catholic Committee's political campaign must be investigated and understood. Moreover, present-day researchers should take note of the Committee's important attempts to build a tolerant, integrated, and prosperous united Ireland, recognising that if the Committee's progressive voice had been heard and appreciated by its contemporary opponents, the later and more tragic developments of civil conflict and sectarian violence might have been averted.

The crucial roles of political moderates, Catholic popular organisations, and Catholic activists in eighteenth-century Ireland must be recognised and their voices reintroduced into Irish historiography. In his work *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson has made the statement, 'I am seeking to rescue the poor ... from the enormous condescension of posterity'.⁵ Similarly, I believe it is essential to rescue the discredited and forgotten efforts of these moderate Irish Catholics from the continuing disregard and disinterest of posterity. It is my strong hope that this dissertation can contribute to that aim and that modern generations will develop the respect for, and appreciation due to, the great efforts of eighteenth-century Irish Catholic activists in their struggle to secure relief and political rights for themselves and for the disfranchised Catholics of Ireland.

⁵ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin edn., 1968), p. 13.

CHAPTER TWO

Roman Catholics in Ireland: Oppression and Tolerance

I

The Penal Era

Although it has been claimed that the penal era in Ireland started after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, at which William of Orange defeated the Catholic King James II and began to support this military victory with a series of anti-Catholic laws aimed at limiting Irish Catholic social and political influence, the history of Catholic exclusion in Ireland dates back much further. For example, during the reign of the Stuart monarch James I, between 1603 and 1625, the English and Irish governments were especially interested in enforcing religious conformity. Extensive attempts were made to extend the influence of government and, in accord with this plan, to compel subjects to accept the authority of the official, established Protestant episcopal Church of Ireland. Government officials feared that Roman Catholicism was fundamentally incompatible with participation in a Protestant state and, ultimately, that Catholics could not be placed in influential positions of power without compromising the integrity of the legal system.

At the start of the seventeenth century, therefore, the Irish government placed severe restrictions on Catholics serving in the legal profession. A correspondent writing in 1612 portrayed this general mistrust of Catholics acting as legal professionals. In a private letter the author described Catholic lawyers as 'arrogant papists that will neither come to the [established Protestant] Church nor take the oath of

obedience'.¹ He went on to display his extreme disgust and frustration by objecting 'that a company so malicious and repugnant to his [Majesty's] laws should be suffered to make a benefit of his [Majesty's] laws'.² In response to such concerns, after 1603 the government stopped appointing Catholic judges and, in 1607, the last remaining Catholic judge was compelled to resign. Moreover, after 1603, the government began to pass measures to prevent practising Catholic lawyers from serving at the bar. In the wake of the infamous Gunpowder Plot of 1605, in which an abortive attempt was made by Catholic extremists to destroy the House of Lords at Westminster, the English government introduced a mandatory oath of allegiance, requiring English Catholics to abjure the Pope's power to depose secular rulers. Similarly, in Ireland, a pre-existing oath of supremacy dating from the 1560s was employed and enforced for all legal professionals. Finally, while Irish Catholic lawyers were obliged to travel to England to receive training, a Protestant Englishman was appointed to the position of Irish Chief Justice and, in December 1606, the Irish deputy and council officially ordered that:

All barristers at law, attorneys, officers in the four courts, clerks of the [crown], etc. admitted since 5 November 1605 shall be debarred from practice and from exercise of their places or offices until they take the oath of supremacy and conform by going to [the established Anglican] church.³

Despite concerted attempts by certain government officials to adhere to these strict regulations, however, the insufficient number of Protestant lawyers in Ireland prevented a total exercise of the official restrictions. While Catholic judges were removed, therefore, Irish Catholic lawyers, attorneys, and solicitors were permitted to swear a more acceptable oath in the 1620s, which merely asserted the King's

¹ Colum Kenny, 'The Exclusion of Catholics from the Legal Profession in Ireland, 1537-1829', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv (1987), 342.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 343 [5 December 1606].

supremacy in secular, but not spiritual, matters and, thereby, to continue acting as legal professionals. Ultimately, this half-hearted enforcement of government restrictions at the start of the century enabled Irish Catholics to continue serving in the capacity of lawyers throughout many parts of the kingdom.

In addition to seeking to limit Catholic participation in the legal profession in the seventeenth century, the Irish government also sought to prevent the spread of Catholicism in Ireland by outlawing Catholic orders and Catholic seminaries. This drove aspiring Irish Catholic clerics to Irish colleges in continental seminaries, most of which had been founded by the end of the sixteenth century in locations such as Salamanca, Douai, and Louvain in Spain and Belgium. Ultimately, this forced exodus helped to strengthen Irish Catholic ties to the continent and encouraged the development of a more international perspective among the educated Catholics of Ireland. Marianne Elliott has emphasised the importance of these continental-trained Irish Catholic clerics by observing the 'vital role' that they played 'in bringing a certain uniformity to Irish Catholicism'.⁴

During the first decades of the seventeenth century, therefore, a tense and uncertain compromise existed between the Irish government, which sought to minimise Catholic influence, and the educated classes of Irish Catholics, which refused to concede power quietly. The government succeeded in limiting Irish Catholic political influence by reappportioning control in the Irish parliament in favour of the newly settled Protestant landowners, who claimed a parliamentary majority by the 1620s and also by further obstructing the appointment of Catholics to civil and military posts in Ireland. Irish Catholics, in turn, withstood government attempts at forced conversion and refused to adopt the state Protestant religion, continuing to send their children

⁴ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2000), p. 74.

abroad to obtain religious training at continental seminaries. This unofficial détente, however, was eventually shattered in the 1640s, after Ireland was drawn into the turmoil of civil conflict between Irish Catholics remaining loyal to King Charles I and Protestants supporting the Westminster parliament and its army.

The infamous uprising of 1641 was strongly symbolic of Irish Catholic frustration with the gradual intrusion of Protestant settlers into the kingdom and the steady subordination of Catholic interests in the settlers' favour. During this episode, at least four thousand Protestants were either ejected from their homes or were massacred over the course of several months between the autumn of 1641 and the summer of 1642. Moreover, the rebellion was tied to the dispute raging between King Charles I and the parliamentarians in England, which had intensified in 1641 after the English parliament had objected to the King's policies and had expressed fears about his employing Irish Catholic military forces. The ringleaders of the Irish Catholic uprising initially acted to prevent a potential parliamentary invasion of Ireland, but, ultimately, lost control of their own rebellion, which descended into wanton sectarian violence. As an immediate outcome of the uprising of 1641, Irish Catholic loyalists were placed in control of the provisional government of Ireland, while later repercussions included the disastrous arrival of Cromwell's parliamentary army in Ireland and the extreme retribution of his forces.

Oliver Cromwell's forces invaded Ireland in 1649. These forces reconquered the kingdom by 1652 on behalf of the English parliament, causing massive destruction and population displacement as a result. In the aftermath of these violent conflicts a Cromwellian settlement was decided in 1652, which affected the balance of political power in Ireland permanently. Cromwell's own personal aversion to the Catholics of Ireland seemed evident in this final agreement, which greatly penalised the entire

Catholic community for its royalist support of King Charles I and its contribution to the uprising of 1641. While the actual leaders of the rebellion were executed and convicted participants were deported, even completely innocent Irish Catholic landowners risked the loss of property and resettlement in Connaught. Moreover, in Irish corporate towns the Catholic inhabitants were deprived of their traditional rights as freemen.

An equally important aspect of these tragic events and the Cromwellian land settlement that followed them was the legacy of mistrust among the psychologically scarred Protestant community of Ireland. In the 1650s, parliamentarians sought to over-emphasise and frequently to distort the levels of violence in the Catholic uprising of 1641. Political pamphleteers reported acts of barbarous cruelty to horrified readers, partly in hopes of influencing the final settlement. These tales, in turn, contributed to the long-standing Protestant misconception that Irish Catholics were irredeemable and untrustworthy. As a result of this propaganda, therefore, Irish Catholics suffered greatly under Cromwell's final land settlement. Maureen MacGeehin has claimed that the Cromwellians took possession of Irish towns for Protestant settlers.⁵ Similarly, Patrick Corish has stated that the Act of Settlement of 1652 divided the kingdom into English Protestants and Irish Papists making 'Irish' and 'Catholic' synonymous.⁶ Corish went on to explain that Catholic land ownership was reduced from 80% to 50% in Leinster and from 66% to 20% in Munster, while in the census of 1659 Catholics constituted only 26% of the population of the City of Dublin.⁷ Finally, Marianne Elliott has described how the 'Cromwellian land settlement cemented the link between Protestantism and land ownership' and that 'the events of 1641 firmly implanted [a]

⁵ Maureen MacGeehin, 'The Catholics of the Towns and the Quarterage Dispute in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, viii (1952), 62.

⁶ Patrick J. Corish and Benignus Millett, *Survival and Reorganization 1650-95: The Origins of Catholic Nationalism* (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son Ltd., 1968), p. 57.

⁷ Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Dublin: Helicon Limited, 1981), p. 54.

notion of Catholicism as a dangerous political system and as such underpinned state policy for almost two centuries'.⁸ These modern views are supported by a seventeenth-century eyewitness describing socio-political conditions in the town of New Ross in 1684:

[In New Ross] the inhabitants are, for the most part, ancient natives of the town and country about it, and so are the chief merchants there that trade beyond the seas, but those that have the government of the corporation and all public employments there are English of a late standing.⁹

Conditions stabilised for the Catholics of Ireland in the decades immediately following this new land settlement under the restored royal government of King Charles II, who returned to England to reclaim his throne in 1660, some twenty months after the death of Oliver Cromwell. Anticipating increased tolerance, in 1661 certain Irish Catholic leaders devised a plan for a Catholic remonstrance, which involved a declaration of loyalty to the king and a demonstration that Catholicism could be compatible with a Protestant state. This controversial measure initially offended certain Irish Catholic clerics, but was later influenced by continental theologians at the Sorbonne and amended to assert the divine right of the king in temporal matters only and, also, to reject the power of the Pope to depose secular rulers. The Catholic remonstrance demonstrated a growing rift within the Catholic community between conservatives, who sought to uphold the authority of the Pope in all cases, and a more liberal party, which accepted the need for compromise with secular rulers. Despite these Catholic efforts, however, the Irish Lord Lieutenant remained unconvinced.

Prior to the eventual arrival of William of Orange in the 1690s, the Catholics of Ireland enjoyed one final opportunity for revived optimism in 1685, at the start of the

⁸ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, pp. 111 & 105.

⁹ Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 54 [Robert Leigh in 1684].

brief reign of the pro-Catholic King James II. In accord with his avowed pro-Catholic sympathies, James II sought to restore rights and privileges to the disadvantaged Catholic community. These intentions were evident in his decision to appoint an Irish Catholic to the office of Lord Deputy of Ireland, the Earl of Tyrconnell. Michael Mullett has also cited an explosion in the Catholic press and the construction of new Catholic chapels in the British Isles during this period, providing further evidence of the temporary flowering of Catholic culture under the fleeting patronage and security of a pro-Catholic king.

After William of Orange landed in England in 1688, King James II fled to France. Eventually, with French support, he arrived in Ireland, where he responded favourably to the requests of his Irish Catholic subjects by calling an Irish parliament that was over 95 per cent Catholic. This Catholic parliament attempted to repeal the Cromwellian land settlement and to re-establish a court of claims in order to return land to the dispossessed Irish Catholics. Marianne Elliott has clarified the motives of the Irish Catholic MPs in the Irish parliament of 1689, claiming that they 'did not seek to create an established Catholic church or to deprive the [Protestant] Church of Ireland of its property. Rather they sought liberty of conscience for all'.¹⁰ Unfortunately, however, while Irish Catholics were pleased by these positive developments, the Protestants of Ireland were outraged and appalled. The attempts of Catholics to reclaim lost land further alienated them from their Protestant neighbours, providing additional motives for mistrust and contributing to additional tensions. All of these issues became unavoidably apparent after the Williamite invasion of Ireland and the defeat of King James' army at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, a military manoeuvre which drove the

¹⁰ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, p. 147.

Jacobite forces into a defensive position in the west of Ireland and marked an end to the Jacobite revival and any hope of Catholic supremacy in Ireland.

With the final destruction of the Jacobite army during the summer and autumn months of 1691, the Irish government and parliament were able to begin implementing a new, strict Williamite political settlement. Through this arrangement, additional land and further privileges were taken from the Catholic population of Ireland over the course of several decades, leading to the description of the period as a penal era for Irish Catholics. One of the first actions taken by the Irish Protestant Williamite parliament of 1691 was the exclusion of Catholics from future parliaments through the introduction of an oath, requiring both the denial of papal authority and the rejection of the Catholic religious tenet of transubstantiation. This oath, which had to be sworn in open court, was then applied to barristers-at-law, clerks, attorneys, and professors of law, effectively preventing Irish Catholics from pleading at the bar. In 1698, these measures were supported by parliamentary legislation which officially prevented Catholics from acting as solicitors. The motives for these acts were explained by two contemporary sources. In the Irish Act of 10 William III, c. 13, it explicitly stated, 'it hath always been found that papist solicitors have been and still are the common disturbers of the peace and tranquillity of his Majesty's subjects in general'.¹¹ Similarly, an unnamed seventeenth-century writer claimed that 'the popish lawyers have upon all occasions been the chief managers of their politics and the main fomenters of all disturbances'.¹² In the wake of the Williamite victory over Catholic Jacobite forces it seemed particularly important to Irish Protestants to render the Catholics of Ireland politically powerless and to eliminate the threat of an Irish Catholic political resurgence.

¹¹ Colum Kenny, 'The Exclusion of Catholics from the Legal Profession in Ireland, 1537-1829', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv (1987), 351.

¹² Ibid., ['Anonymous writer between 1693-97'].

These immediate actions were promptly followed by additional anti-Catholic laws and measures. Maureen MacGeehin has cited the imposition of a similarly strict oath on the freemen of Dublin and the introduction of a by-law denying freedom to the Catholic inhabitants of the City of Cork.¹³ These measures granted Irish Protestants the total and complete control of these two important city corporations, including all political privileges, legal exemptions, and social benefits, such as exclusive rights to vote at municipal elections and full memberships in the city guilds. Patrick Corish has also described anti-Catholic legislation intended to limit the transmission of Catholic principles, practices, and beliefs to future generations by preventing Irish Catholics from educating their children: 'no popish person may teach school, instruct youth, or in private houses teach or instruct youth except private family'.¹⁴ Marianne Elliott has cited penal legislation passed in 1695, which prohibited Irish Catholics from carrying arms, keeping horses valued over £5, and sending Catholic children abroad for education.¹⁵ Finally, several modern historians have noted the passage of the significant Banishment Act of 1697, by which Catholic bishops, ecclesiastic clergy, and Catholic regulars were required to depart Ireland before 1 May 1698.

In addition to limiting Irish Catholic political and social influence, preventing the Catholics of Ireland from reclaiming confiscated lands, and re-establishing ties to the exiled Stuart monarchs, the penal laws were enacted to encourage conversion and prevent the growth of Catholicism. The British and Irish governments remained devoted to the cause of religious conformity and attempted to enforce this uniform Protestant Anglicanism by erecting social and economic barriers in Ireland, which operated to obstruct Irish Catholic advancement while promoting the prosperity of Irish

¹³ Maureen MacGeehin, 'The Catholics of the Towns and the Quarterage Dispute in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, viii (1952), 64.

¹⁴ Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 79.

¹⁵ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, p. 165.

Protestants. For example, during the reign of Queen Anne between 1702 and 1714, new penal laws were passed affecting legal professions and government officials and restricting Irish Catholic possession of land. In 1704, a sacramental test was introduced requiring that civil and military officials, solicitors, and barristers in Ireland provide proof of their adoption of the Anglican faith by receiving the Anglican sacrament: '[no person] admitted to the bar and practice as barrister until he shall produce an authoritative certificate of his receiving the sacrament according to the usage of the Church of Ireland as by law established'.¹⁶ In addition, an act of 1702 outlawed the Catholic acquisition of land by purchase or by inheritance from a Protestant, while another law required that Catholic estates be divided equally among heirs. This system of land inheritance, known as 'gavelkind', was unique for Irish Catholics. It contrasted strongly with Irish Protestant inheritance, by which an entire estate could pass to a single heir without alteration, and, thereby, placed Irish Catholic landowning families at a severe disadvantage as they risked the distribution and dispersal of valuable landholdings among multiple heirs. Partly as a result of this subtle legislative persuasion, by 1719 over 150 Catholics had conformed to the Protestant Anglican Church of Ireland.¹⁷

During Queen Anne's reign, which became plagued by concerns over the royal succession, specialised oaths were also introduced to force Irish Catholics to uphold her claim to the throne and to deny the rights of the pretender, 'James III'. This oath of abjuration was initially intended for individuals voting at parliamentary elections, but through an act of 1709, magistrates became empowered to require the oath of all adult males and registered Irish Catholic clerics. After papal condemnation of the oath,

¹⁶ Colum Kenny, 'The Exclusion of Catholics from the Legal Profession in Ireland, 1537-1829', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv (1987), 352.

¹⁷ Ibid.

which avoided any statement about Catholic religious practice or papal authority, many Catholic clerics refused to swear it and suffered further disabilities as a result.

Although concerns over the royal succession were ultimately resolved by 1714, after the Protestant Elector of Hanover, George I, ascended the thrones of Great Britain and Ireland and prevented the return of the exiled Catholic Stuarts, Catholic discrimination in Ireland continued unabated. One of the initial acts taken during the reign of King George I was the improvement of the Irish militia. In 1715 parliamentary legislation permitted local Protestant landowners to commission and raise entirely Protestant militia forces, replete with the power to seize the horses of Irish Catholics when necessary and, also, to demand payments from local Catholics for the support of these militias at double the rate paid by Protestants. Similarly, in 1715, new laws were passed by the Irish parliament preventing Irish Catholics from acting as higher petty constables in counties, parishes and towns and requiring all acting constables to demonstrate their loyalty by taking all of the established oaths. These measures were considered essential in maintaining domestic security and tranquillity after the Hanoverian Protestant succession because Irish Catholics continued to be blamed for past uprisings and fears persisted of a renewed Catholic rebellion. This suspicion and mistrust was particularly evident in a parliamentary address to the king made in 1717:

As the Irish [Catholics] by the forfeiture of their estates became less able to put in execution their treasonable designs, so by corrupting the blood of their nobility and depriving them and their posterity of their hereditary titles and honours ... they have had less power and credit with their followers to lead them into rebellion.¹⁸

Although penal restrictions continued and anti-Catholic attitudes persisted, in the absence of an Irish Catholic Jacobite uprising conditions improved slightly for the

¹⁸ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press* (Co. Kildare: Maynooth, 1965), p. 28 [10 September 1717].

Catholics of Ireland by the 1720s. Following the peaceful accession of King George II in 1727, Irish Catholics were able to enjoy greater toleration. Catholic officials at the Vatican expressed the necessity for fidelity and obedience to secular rulers, a proclamation which helped encourage many Irish Catholics to accept and swear the oath of loyalty to King George II. In 1727, therefore, a group of Irish Catholics presented a humble address to their new sovereign which congratulated him on his accession and expressly stated that their allegiance proceeded 'from a firm belief of its being a religious duty, which no power on Earth can dispense with'.¹⁹

In spite of this attempt at encouraging good will between the royal government and the Catholics of Ireland, however, the Irish government continued to pass legislation restricting Irish Catholic political participation. New laws appeared between 1727 and 1733 further regulating the actions of Catholic barristers, solicitors, and attorneys. These limitations included the requirement of an official license and the exclusion of all legal professionals married to Catholics, crimes which could be penalised by the imposition of a fine or a term of imprisonment. In addition, the extremely significant passage of a new piece of legislation in 1728 made certain earlier acts obsolete. A 1728 Irish act for regulating the election of members of parliament bluntly stated that no Catholic could vote at any parliamentary or corporate election for MPs or city magistrates. This law, therefore, made the earlier imposition of oaths essentially defunct as even Irish Catholics willing to swear the required oaths were barred from participation in the parliamentary franchise.

J. G. Simms has explained that prior to 1728 Catholics retained the franchise through the involvement of a conservative church party in the Irish parliament 'whose attitude was influenced by the fact that the extreme opponents of Catholics were

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 46 [29 July 1727, '*Humble Address of the Roman Catholics of the Kingdom of Ireland*'].

supporters of the [Protestant] dissenters and in favour of removing the sacramental test'.²⁰ Moreover, Simms has claimed that important Protestant landowners wanted Catholic tenants and freeholders who could vote in their favour at the comparatively frequent parliamentary elections held between 1690 and 1727, but that 'with the accession of George II, robust and in his forty-fourth year, the next general election was, rightly, regarded as a distant prospect and the time was considered appropriate for the disenfranchisement of Catholics'.²¹

These later waves of penal legislation differed from the anti-Catholic laws passed immediately after the Williamite victory and during the reign of Queen Anne because they hinted at the failure of the earlier attempts at forced conversion and political control. While the earlier waves of penal laws seemed concerned with the immediate necessity to ensure the security of the Protestant Williamite land settlement and to permit a peaceful Protestant succession, by the 1720s multiple loopholes had emerged in the penal code. Irish Catholics had been exploiting these weaknesses by publicly conforming to the Anglican Church while privately continuing to practise the Catholic religion. In 1724 an eighteenth-century eyewitness cited an example of these practices:

The practice of the law ... is at present mostly in the hands of new converts, who give no further security on this account than producing a certificate of their having received the sacrament in the Church of England or Ireland, which several of them who were papists at London obtain on the road thither and demand to be admitted barrister in virtue of it, at their arrival.²²

²⁰ J. G. Simms, 'Irish Catholics and the Parliamentary Franchise, 1692-1728', *Irish Historical Studies*, xii (1961), 36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²² Colum Kenny, 'The Exclusion of Catholics from the Legal Profession in Ireland, 1537-1829', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxv (1987), 353 [Primate Hugh Boulter to Duke of Newcastle, 1724].

As evidence of this pragmatic and opportunist religious conformity became known to Irish legislators, new laws were introduced to close loopholes. Several new pieces of legislation in the 1720s and 1730s, sought to redefine an Irish Catholic as any person married to a Catholic, either officially or covertly, and any person raising and educating their children according to the Roman Catholic tradition. Through these improved definitions, Irish officials sought to obstruct the attempts of certain Catholics to circumvent penal legislation and continue the growth of Irish Catholicism. As surviving eighteenth-century evidence and extensive modern historical investigation has shown, however, these legislative efforts ultimately failed.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Catholic population of Ireland had carved out a niche within Irish society and had ensured its own social and economic survival, despite the existence of an oppressive penal code. With the confiscation of Catholic land and the subsequent legislative barriers placed on Catholic land acquisition, many educated Catholic families turned to the unrestricted practice of international mercantilism instead. In 1718 Archbishop King explained: 'I may further observe that the papists being made incapable to purchase lands have turned themselves to trade and already engrossed almost all the trade of the kingdom'.²³ Similarly, in 1724, a correspondent was able to assert that 'it is well known that the Roman Catholic merchants carry on more than half the trade of the kingdom and pay more custom and duty for imported goods than all the Protestants in it'.²⁴

This important commercial trend involved the large-scale migration of middle-class Irish Catholics into Dublin and other large port cities. Patrick Fagan has demonstrated that, while the percentage of Catholics in Dublin stood at 30% in 1715,

²³ Maureen Wall, 'The Rise of a Catholic Middle Class in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, xi (1959), 98.

²⁴ Maureen MacGeehin, 'The Catholics of the Towns and the Quarterage Dispute in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, viii (1952), 101 [1724, Cornelius Nary].

by the 1760s it had risen to 60%. Moreover, he shows that the greatest concentration of Catholics in Dublin was in the western sector of the city, both north and south of the Liffey, and that the parishes of St. Nicholas' Without, St. Catherine's, and St. Michan's all had large Catholic majorities.²⁵ Although this urban Catholic population was barred from full participation in city guilds and political corporations, they were able to receive partial benefits by paying a quarterage fee, which enabled them to continue trading freely. The phenomenon of increasing Catholic prosperity was also described in an enquiry into the state of Popery in Ireland, which was ordered by the Irish House of Lords in 1731, showing that Catholicism had indeed made advances in spite of penal legislation. Within this same decade, Catholic education continued throughout Ireland in underground schools opened partly in response to the introduction of royal charter schools for 'instructing and converting' Catholic children.²⁶ Finally, Patrick Corish has claimed that urban Catholics constituted 'a reading public' with established Catholic publishers in Dublin, Cork, and Waterford catering to audiences interested in French spirituality and, moreover, that an organised Catholic parish system had been established throughout the kingdom by the 1730s.²⁷

Partly through the rise of an underground Catholic gentry, the Irish countryside was equally important to the survival and economic prosperity of educated Catholics in the middle of the eighteenth century. Kevin Whelan has explained this rural phenomenon, which involved the maintenance of social stability through the transformation of old, Catholic proprietors and gentry into large leaseholders, who in turn rented land to under tenants. These Catholic middlemen manipulated the penal laws to establish security through perpetual tenancies, while building family fortunes

²⁵ Patrick Fagan, 'The Population of Dublin in the Eighteenth-Century with Particular Reference to the Proportions of Protestants and Catholics', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: iris an da chultúr*, vi (1991), 133-4.

²⁶ Maureen Wall, *The Penal Laws, 1691-1760* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, 1967), p. 9

²⁷ Patrick J. Corish, *The Catholic Community in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 82.

by exacting high rents from their under tenants. In Maria Edgeworth's novel, *Castle Rackrent*, these classes of Catholics are described negatively: 'the characteristics of a middleman were servility to his superiors and tyranny towards his inferiors. The poor detested this race of beings'.²⁸ Modern historians, however, have acknowledged the important political and social contributions of Catholic middlemen, who set cultural tones, preserved social structures, and provided political leadership. Louis Cullen has claimed that these classes of Catholic leaseholders, which were 'quite visible in the countryside' by the 1750s, were distinguished by frugality and a devotion to education: 'an interest in education was the logical outcome of the economic rise of the big farmer'.²⁹ Additionally, Kevin Whelan has stated that:

The hidden Ireland of the eighteenth century was not incarnated in the *cos-mhuintir* – the proliferating, poverty-stricken base of the social pyramid – nor in the flamboyant but restricted world of the Munster middleman. The custodians of tradition were the comfortable, Catholic big farm class of South Leinster and East Munster, hybrid Norman-Gaels who provided stability and continuity.³⁰

By the middle of the eighteenth century, therefore, Catholic religious practices and social structures were being preserved and passed down throughout the countryside. Additionally, Irish Catholics were prospering economically both through international commerce and trade networks and the opportunity of becoming long-term, leaseholding middlemen. The eventual development of an Irish Catholic political movement, which initially sought merely security, tolerance, and limited relief from

²⁸ Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 20.

²⁹ Louis M. Cullen, 'Catholic Social Classes under the Penal Laws' in *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, (ed.) T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), p. 59.

³⁰ Kevin Whelan, 'An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: iris an da chultúr*, x (1995), 40.

penal restrictions, was an inevitable corollary to this survival and success, which the educated classes of Irish Catholics achieved in the face of penal era oppression.

II

An Irish Catholic Cause

The decade of the 1750s witnessed important political innovations in Ireland, the appearance of new, secular Irish Catholic apologists, who sought increased acceptance for their co-religionists; a groundbreaking legal precedent, which resulted from a dispute between Irish Catholic merchants in Cork and the city's mayor; and the progress of an emergent Irish Catholic movement. Moreover, while Catholic merchants sought to uphold their rights and educated Catholic pamphleteers began publishing apologetic tracts, members of the Catholic clergy congregated to discuss a novel tactic. In September 1757, seven leading Catholic bishops responded to fears of renewed penal law enforcement against Catholic clerics following the outbreak of war with France by assembling at the home of the Catholic, Lord Trimlestown. In addition to drafting a letter instructing the Catholic clergy to pray for and express loyalty to the royal family after Sunday Mass, the seven bishops proposed making public statements clarifying certain tenets of Catholicism: 'It is not and never was a doctrine or tenet of the Roman Catholic Church that the Pope or general councils have power to depose kings or absolve subjects from [their] allegiance'.³¹

Although certain Irish Catholic clerics objected to this manoeuvre and refused to comply with the plan, the action of the seven bishops symbolised a significant trend within the Irish Catholic community of the 1750s, that is, the determination to supplement their cultural and economic survival with national acceptance and security.

³¹ Maureen Wall, *The Penal Laws, 1691-1760*, pp. 65-66.

Two of the earliest and most influential Irish Catholic pamphleteers to adopt and espouse the cause of Catholic security were Charles O'Connor and Dr. John Curry. Both of these men were highly educated members of the Irish Catholic middle classes. Curry, a trained physician, was later described by O'Connor as the person who had 'planned out the conduct which Catholics ought to pursue under a lenient government, which permits their existence in the land when the laws forbid it'.³² O'Connor was equally devoted to the cause of Irish Catholic security. Like the seven bishops, he advocated making explanatory statements to clarify the controversial tenets of Catholicism and he advised the Catholics of Ireland to build bridges with their Protestant neighbours in order to form 'a positive relationship with the existing society'.³³ By moving away from discussions about Jacobite issues and concentrating on the economic incentives for improved Catholic tolerance instead, O'Connor and Curry contributed greatly to the development of a more sophisticated religious discourse in Ireland. Moreover, they insisted that Irish Catholics shared the same political beliefs as Protestants and that 'the historical and existing association of Catholicism with arbitrary government was accidental ... that the immutable religion [of Catholicism] imposed no belief dangerous to the British constitution'.³⁴

One of Charles O'Connor's most important publications was entitled *The Case of the Roman Catholics of Ireland; Wherein the Principles and Conduct of that Party are Fully Explained and Vindicated*. This pamphlet, which was dated 10 June 1755, advanced the significant arguments that the necessity for penal laws no longer existed and that Catholics should co-operate with royal government by making an official declaration of their loyalty and affection: 'the causes of former disturbances in Ireland

³² Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee* (2 vols., London, 1829), p. 6 [O'Connor to Dr. Carpenter, 5 November 1773].

³³ Douglas A. Leighton, 'Theobald McKenna and the Catholic Question' (unpublished MA thesis, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1985), p. 93.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.

are now no more. Let not the effects, when such causes are removed, remain'.³⁵ While seeking to usher in a new age, O'Connor explained to his audience that 'penal laws should ever drop with the crimes and principles which gave occasion to them'.³⁶ He then went on to associate the general state of the kingdom with the oppressed and 'indolent' condition of the Irish Catholic community. This innovative argument was employed to justify a slight relaxation of the penal code and the increased opportunity of Catholic land acquisition:

It is vain to derive the indolence and sloth of our popish inhabitants from any other source than this of our incapacitating and primitive laws. ... The cure of this evil is not only before us, it is pressing itself upon us. Give your papists a power over moderate parcels of land.³⁷

O'Connor's shrewd and daring attempts to defend the Catholics of Ireland without participating in outdated debates about Jacobitism marked a crucial turning point in the evolution of the Catholic cause. He successfully shifted the focus of discussion and provided a framework for future pro-Catholic pamphleteers and activists. By calling for unity and Catholic obedience, O'Connor addressed the primary concerns of Protestants and, by humbly seeking the economic improvement of all Ireland through limited Catholic relief, O'Connor contributed to Catholic security and took a massive stride towards the gradual repeal of penal restrictions. He asked his audience to consider carefully: 'Is it for the advantage of Ireland, already too thin of inhabitants ... to cramp the industry and encourage the flight of men, who from the nature of restraint ... grow listless and indolent?'³⁸

³⁵ Charles O'Connor, *The Case of the Roman Catholics of Ireland; Wherein the Principles and Conduct of That Party are Fully Explained and Vindicated* (Dublin, 1755), p. 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

One year after the publication of *The Case of the Roman Catholics of Ireland*, Charles O'Connor, John Curry, and a third Catholic associate, Thomas Wyse of County Waterford, took further action on behalf of the Catholic cause. After witnessing the rejection of a legislative measure providing legal recognition to Irish Catholics, in 1756 the three men felt compelled to help establish a Catholic committee or association.³⁹ This popular organisation was intended from the outset to campaign for the repeal of the poorly conceived penal code and to demonstrate that Catholicism could be compatible to a Protestant state. One of the early actions taken by this new Irish Catholic Committee was the presentation of an address of loyalty to the Irish Lord Lieutenant, an action to which he responded favourably:

The zeal and attachment which the Catholics professed could never be more seasonally manifested than in the present conjecture ... and as long as they conducted themselves with duty and affection, they could not fail to receive his Majesty's protection.⁴⁰

Writing in the 1820s, Wyse's great-grandson, Sir Thomas Wyse, attributed the suggestion of this loyal address, which carried the signatures of over 400 individuals, to Charles O'Connor at a Catholic citizens meeting in the Globe Tavern on Essex Street.⁴¹ Sir Thomas also claimed that his own great-grandfather had proposed a plan for improving the Committee by introducing a larger, more representative structure and that these extended gatherings were first held in the Elephant Tavern on Essex Street.⁴² Although not all of Sir Thomas Wyse's historical statements can be satisfactorily corroborated, the nineteenth-century writer does agree with the statements of

³⁹ In 1756, Lord Clanbrassil of County Down sought legislation to regularise and recognise Catholicism in Ireland, a measure which met with universal rejection and demonstrated the unsatisfactory nature of the penal code.

Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, p. 176.

⁴⁰ Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee*, i, p. 64 [10 December 1759].

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 67-8.

contemporary historians, who assert that this early Catholic Committee was composed primarily of Irish Catholic merchants from Dublin and that organisational restructuring occurred at the start of the 1760s.

The emergence of the Catholic Committee at the end of the 1750s coincided with the outbreak of the Seven Years' War between France and Britain. During this war between Britain and her traditional Catholic rival, old fears of Irish Catholic persecution were revived along with the corresponding necessity to demonstrate unwavering Irish Catholic obedience through the presentation of public addresses of loyalty. The unexpected emergence of a secondary issue, however, encouraged the Committee to engage in greater and more significant forms of political activity. This situation developed from a legal case in the City of Cork in which a Catholic merchant challenged the city's mayor after he attempted to defend the local guilds and uphold their rights to demand special quarterage fees from Cork's Catholic merchants.

Although Catholic merchants were excluded from full participation in guilds, they were able to obtain security and permission to trade legally through the regular payment of a quarterage fee. The payment of this fee entitled Catholics to limited rights within the guild as quarter-brothers, but it did not entitle them to participate in decision making, which was reserved solely for freemen and full guild members. Additionally, upon payment of quarterage the Catholic merchants would receive a bond showing their quarter-brother relationship to the local guild. Maureen MacGeehin has explained that in Dublin 'according to these bonds, quarter-brothers, at their own humble request were allowed to carry on their trade within the liberties and franchises of the City of Dublin on condition that they paid quarterage regularly for themselves

and for each journeyman or servant'.⁴³ Eventually, the quarterage fee became an important source of revenue for the guilds due to the increasing numbers of Catholics and non-free merchants in Dublin, Cork, and other Irish port cities.

As early as the 1730s, Catholic merchants in Cork had begun to question the legality of this system and the unacceptable demands of the city guilds. By the 1750s certain traders refused to comply and failed to make the requisite quarterage payments. As a result of this action, the guilds sought to impose an additional fine for non-payment and, ultimately, to have the city uphold their legal rights to collect quarterage. This occurred when the Mayor of Cork intervened on behalf of the guilds and began to arrest the Catholic non-freemen for non-payment. Ultimately, the dispute moved to Dublin after an Irish Catholic merchant from Cork brought a suit against the mayor in 1758. Although the King's Bench ruled in favour of the Catholic non-freeman and against the mayor, who was told to pay £100, the case took another five years to be settled and later involved further determination and resistance to the court by the City of Cork, which made additional arrests for non-payment until 1763.

O'Connor, Curry, and Wyse became interested in the debate partly due to the large number of Catholic merchants in the early Catholic Committee. Moreover, during the 1760s the matter was brought to the attention of the Irish parliament by town corporations throughout the kingdom, which sought to uphold their authority in the face of Catholic resistance and to obtain official legal affirmation of their traditional rights. In 1765 and 1766, city corporations from Limerick, Cork, Waterford, Dublin, Wexford, Clonmel, New Ross, Drogheda, and Youghal transmitted petitions asking for parliamentary legislation in support of their cause. This in turn drove the Catholic non-freemen to act in their defence and to draft their own petitions to protest the proposed

⁴³ Maureen MacGeehin, 'The Catholics of the Towns and the Quarterage Dispute in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, viii (1952), 98.

bill. Although the Catholic merchants ultimately achieved victory after the proposed bill was blocked by the Irish Privy Council in 1768, the entire affair brought even greater attention to the extreme vulnerability of the Catholic community.

While city corporations and town guilds possessed political power, authority, and financial clout, the Catholics of Ireland had no organ through which to express their views. In eighteenth-century Ireland, where the actual exercise of law depended on local interpretation and enforcement, this left the disfranchised Catholic community susceptible to the whims of unsympathetic Protestant officials, magistrates, solicitors, judges and juries. Popular societies, such as the Catholic Committee, therefore, had an essential role to play in providing these disadvantaged and marginalised Catholics with a voice and acting as a legal and political advocate in all cases where the rights of Irish Catholic subjects were called into question.

While seeking to provide the Irish Catholics with a popular political organ, O'Connor, Curry and Wyse remained aware of the necessity to secure royal favour and to court the affection of the crown government through repeated declarations of Catholic obedience and loyalty. This policy was strongly evident in 1760, at the time of the accession of King George III, through the presentation of an Irish Catholic address to the King. In the 1820s, Sir Thomas Wyse claimed that this loyal address had been drawn up by Charles O'Connor and that the declaration was ultimately supported by nearly 600 signatures.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, however, Wyse also explained that the Irish Catholic clergy and landed gentry refused to co-operate with O'Connor and his Catholic Committee and that they presented their own separate loyal addresses instead. For example, the Address of the Roman Catholic Noblemen and Gentlemen of Meath and

⁴⁴ Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee*, i, p. 72.

Westmeath appeared in public newspapers in the winter of 1761. This declaration stated:

It is an unspeakable consolation to the Roman Catholics of this kingdom to have some reason to hope that their invariable, loyal, dutiful, and submissive behaviour during a series of seventy years has met with the approbation of your royal predecessors.⁴⁵

Writing about the Irish Catholic clergy, Vincent McNally has explained that these strained relations between O'Connor's new popular Catholic Committee and the traditional leaders of Catholic Ireland arose because 'both the Committee and most other Catholic bishops were mutually suspicious of the other'.⁴⁶ McNally has also claimed that 'the bishops feared that the Committee might compromise them in church matters; [while] the Committee was convinced that their bishops ... were not really committed to Catholic relief'.⁴⁷ This view has been further corroborated by O'Connor himself, who displayed frustration in a letter to John Curry in 1761:

Despair, or pride, or indifference, or unmeaning motives have arrested their hands and with these we must bear as with the other moral evils of life. Will it be overlooked that our ecclesiastics to a man have been entirely passive in the prosecution of this measure?⁴⁸

As the incipient Irish Catholic movement began to develop during the important decade of the 1760s, both positive and negative by-products emerged, including the appearance of an uneasy competition between the traditional and new leaders of the Catholic community. Similarly, with the arrival of outspoken Irish Catholic defenders and public apologists, a renewed wave of conservatives expressed their oppositional, anti-Catholic views. While the city corporations were preparing and presenting

⁴⁵ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 100 [3 February 1761].

⁴⁶ Vincent J. McNally, *Reform, Revolution and Reaction, Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the Catholic Church in Ireland, 1787-1817*, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee*, i, p. 72 [6 February 1761].

parliamentary petitions to legitimise their authority over the Catholic non-freemen trading in towns throughout the kingdom, a seventeenth-century account of the 1641 Catholic uprising was reprinted in Cork in 1766.

The History of the General Rebellion in Ireland Raised Upon the Three and Twentieth Day of October, 1641, by Sir John Temple, had originally appeared in 1646, five years after the infamous event. The eighteenth-century edition of the pamphlet remained essentially unaltered, containing all of the propagandist, anti-Catholic rhetoric originally included by its seventeenth-century author and replete with grotesque imagery intended to demonise and permanently tarnish the reputation of the Catholics of Ireland. In reprinting this offensive tract, the publishers must have been aware of its tendency to reignite the long-standing debates over Catholic loyalty and the subversive authority of Irish Catholic clerics. In certain passages, the Catholic rebels were accused of seeking to seize the government: 'so impetuous were the desires of the natives to draw the whole of the kingdom into their own hands', ⁴⁹ while in other sections Catholic priests were charged with encouraging the mass murder of Protestant settlers: 'the people being now set at liberty and prepossessed by their priests with a belief that it was lawful for them to rise up and destroy all the Protestants'. ⁵⁰ Most insidious, however, was the portrayal of Irish Catholics as uncivilised savages engaging in unspeakable acts of cruelty and barbarity:

The very Irish children in the very beginning fell to strip and kill English children: all other relations were quite cancelled and laid aside ... their servants were killed as they were ploughing in the fields, husbands cut to pieces in the presence of their wives; their children's brains dashed out before their faces; others had all their goods and cattle seized and carried away; their houses burnt; their habitations laid waste and all as it were at an instant before they could suspect the Irish for their enemies. ⁵¹

⁴⁹ Sir John Temple, *The History of the General Rebellion in Ireland Raised Upon the Three and Twentieth Day of October, 1641* (7th edition, Cork, 1766), p. 122.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Although these exaggerated and outdated views may have been unpopular and uncommon among many Irish Protestant communities in the middle of the eighteenth century, the reprinting of Sir Temple's vociferously anti-Catholic pamphlet indicates the existence of early opposition to the new Irish Catholic movement. With the appearance of this powerful propaganda, many hesitant Irish Protestants may have been adversely influenced into adopting similar anti-Catholic attitudes and prejudices.

Overall, however, the decade contained more positive change and advancement than obstruction. This belief is expressed by modern historians, who describe the 1760s as 'a more hopeful time for the Catholics of Ireland'.⁵² T. P. Power has claimed that the decade involved 'a transition from a period when Catholicism was informally tolerated to one when its status was recognised'.⁵³ One important development of the 1760s involved the death of the Old Stuart Pretender, James III, in 1766, along with the Pope's decision to abandon the Jacobite cause and to permit Irish Catholics to swear an oath rejecting Jacobite claims. A second significant event was the passage of the Octennial Act in 1768, by which Irish parliamentary elections became regularly held at eight-year intervals, rather than being held only upon the accession of a new sovereign. Similarly, by the end of the decade measures were discussed for the introduction of pro-Catholic mortgage legislation, which, if passed, would have lessened the restrictions on Irish Catholic creditors, permitting them to lend money on landed security as well as on personal security. Finally, the presence of a liberal and tolerant party within the Irish Privy Council and the Irish parliament prevented the passage of the legislation sought by Protestant city corporations to uphold their authority over Catholic non-freemen. J. P. Day has recognised the crucial emergence of this pro-Catholic party between 1767

⁵² Patrick Rogers, *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation, 1778-1793* (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne Ltd., 1934), p. 1.

⁵³ T. P. Power, *Land Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 329.

and 1774, explaining that they had 'established a substantial minority in both houses committed to the relief of Roman Catholics and had seen members of this minority obtain influential positions in government'.⁵⁴ Perhaps the most significant advancement for the Catholic cause during the decade of the 1760s, however, came in the form of inspiration for an Irish Protestant cleric to construct a new and more acceptable Catholic oath of loyalty.

Frederick Hervey, the Protestant Bishop of Cloyne and later Bishop of Derry, was a firm supporter of the Catholic cause by the middle of the eighteenth century. His interest in the movement stemmed from personal liberal views combined with a sincere desire to reconcile differences and obtain peace for Ireland, while simultaneously providing relief for the Irish Catholic community. In 1767 he demonstrated his commitment to these causes while explaining an innovative new scheme to a Catholic correspondent:

Surely the oaths and declarations which I have myself drawn are such as any loyal subject would not scruple and any conscientious Catholic may safely swear. My object is to leave you your faith entire, but to secure your allegiance to the present government and to make you independent of all foreign jurisdiction whatever. For, depend on it, that there is not an iota in the scriptures to warrant the least temporal jurisdiction in the Bishop of Rome.⁵⁵

In the early months of 1768, Hervey met with Irish Catholic gentry and Catholic Committee leaders to discuss this new test oath. From its inception, Catholic leaders recognised that the new oath could act as a preliminary measure ahead of and in conjunction with more substantial Catholic relief acts. In framing the oath, the Protestant Bishop sought inspiration from such sources as the Gallician Church in France, where a more independent form of national Catholicism had become

⁵⁴ J. P. Day, 'The Catholic Question in the Irish Parliament, 1760-82' (unpublished MA thesis, University College Dublin, 1973), pp. 106-7.

⁵⁵ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, pp. 169-170 [31 October 1767].

established. Despite his efforts and careful attention to detail, however, in 1768 Roman officials rejected an early draft of the new test oath. T. P. Power has explained that, rather than quashing the measure completely, in the early 1770s this decision caused a sensation among the Irish Catholics seeking a compromise and 'quickened their resolve to devise an acceptable oath'.⁵⁶

Bishop Hervey, for example, corresponded with Charles O'Connor and the Catholic Committee in 1774 in pursuit of their common goal to draft an acceptable Catholic test oath and, consequently, in February 1774 the Committee officially resolved 'that it is expedient at this time for the Catholics of Ireland to prepare a profession of their civil principles'.⁵⁷ A thorough outline of controversial Catholic tenets, including papal authority; the murder of heretics; the deposition of a Protestant sovereign; and the rejection of the Stuart pretender, promptly followed and was forwarded to the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. John Carpenter, for approval on 3 March.⁵⁸ Before the Committee's carefully drafted resolution could be transmitted to the Irish parliament, however, the Committee learned that the heads of a bill containing a Catholic oath had already been introduced into the Irish House of Commons several days earlier, a fact which was contained in local newspapers in March 1774: 'Mr. French reported the bill to allow papists to take an oath of allegiance to his Majesty ... and Mr. French ordered to carry it up to the Lord Lieutenant'.⁵⁹ Although the Catholic Committee and Charles O'Connor may have been too late to direct the final form of the Catholic test oath, which ultimately became law and received royal assent in June 1774, their determination combined with the wider efforts of Catholic activists, the support of

⁵⁶ T. P. Power, *Land Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary*, p. 268.

⁵⁷ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 17 [3 February 1774, 'At the Committee Room in Essex St.'].

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁹ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 163 [17 March 1774].

the pro-Catholic faction in government, and the weak opposition in parliament to help secure the passage of this important measure.

In its final form, the act to permit Catholics to profess loyalty with an oath of allegiance was largely based on the efforts of Hervey, the Bishop of Derry. The prescribed oath included a statement renouncing the surviving descendants of King James II, while expressing absolute loyalty to King George III and the royal family. It went on to reject the tenet 'that it is lawful to murder or destroy any person or persons whatsoever for or under pretence of their being heretics' as well as the long-standing Protestant belief 'that princes excommunicated by the Pope and council ... may be deposed or murdered by their subjects or by any person whatever'.⁶⁰ Finally, the test oath of 1774 concluded with the important absolute assertion that:

I do declare, that I do not believe that the Pope of Rome or any other foreign prince, prelate, state or potentate hath or ought to have any temporal or civil jurisdiction, power, superiority, or pre-eminence directly or indirectly within this realm.⁶¹

Although Hervey may have found nothing controversial in these honest professions of Catholic faith, unexpected opposition immediately arose from certain powerful Catholic clerics. Irish Catholic bishops with strong ties to the Vatican primarily objected to the specific mention of the Pope in the test oath. These conservative clerics, who came to be known as the non-jurors, flatly refused to swear the oath. Conversely, the more liberal and pragmatic Irish Catholic clerics, who were representative of Gallician principles in Ireland, accepted the test oath and were anxious to testify their loyalty. Many of these individuals, who included Archbishop Butler of Cashel, Bishop Egan of Waterford, and Bishop Moylan of Cork, came from Munster

⁶⁰ Rev. Thomas R. England, *The Life of the Reverend Arthur O'Leary, Including Historical Anecdotes, Memoirs & Many Hitherto Unpublished Documents Illustrative of the Condition of the Irish Catholics During the Eighteenth Century* (London: A. & R. Spottiswoode, 1822), pp. 56-57 ['Oath of 1774'].

⁶¹ Ibid.

and the southern counties, which had recently been the scene of rural sectarian violence. As a result of these unstable conditions, the Catholic clerics of Munster considered an official pronouncement of obedience to be essential. The Rev. Thomas England has summarised the vital and pragmatic considerations, which necessitated clerical acceptance of the oath in Southern Ireland:

Parts of Munster had been long the theatre of the greatest tumults, such as excited alarm in the government and were by the enemies of the Catholics said to be fomented and promoted by them. To free themselves entirely from these suspicions, no other way was left, nor could any be more effective, than their approval of the test.⁶²

The test oath of 1774, therefore, offended certain Irish Catholic bishops while providing other Irish Catholic clerics with an opportunity to demonstrate their loyal and peaceful intentions. Within one year of its passage, large numbers of Irish Catholic clerics and gentlemen availed themselves of the opportunity to secure their positions through the official pronouncement of the oath. The Catholic Lord Trimlestown advertised a public meeting to be held in the morning of 28 June 1775 at the Music Hall on Fishamble Street. During this gathering nearly sixty Irish Catholic men of property assembled and walked *en masse* to the King's Bench to swear the test oath. Public newspapers reported this event five days later, expressing a hope that Trimlestown's example would be followed and reminding their readers that, 'this test may be taken and the declaration subscribed before any justice of the peace ... or before any magistrate of any city or town corporate where they reside'.⁶³ Ultimately, despite their initial objections, even the more conservative, non-juring Catholic clerics were obliged to accept and swear the oath before the end of the decade to preserve and safeguard their own authority over the laity.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 67-68.

⁶³ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 173 [3 July 1775].

The Catholic Committee also remained involved in supporting the Catholic cause at the start of the 1770s. In addition to assisting with the new test oath, a revival of the quarterage debate engrossed the Committee's attention between April 1773 and December 1775. Both Sir Thomas Wyse and Maureen MacGeehin have claimed that between 1763 and 1773 the Catholic Committee was inactive and had effectively dissolved.⁶⁴ This view may be supported by the fact that the Minute Book of the Catholic Committee officially opens on 1 April 1773, suggesting the possibility of a new start for the organisation. Although Dr. John Curry's name appears once as chairman on 3 May 1773, Charles O'Connor's name is conspicuously absent throughout 1773, not appearing in the minute book until 3 February 1774, at the same meeting that the Committee resolved to 'prepare a profession of [Catholic] civil principles' in conjunction with the proposed new test oath.⁶⁵

Throughout this first year, the Catholic Committee was primarily concerned with the rights of non-freemen. In the opening entry on 1 April 1773, the members resolved to 'take into consideration the case of the non-freemen of Clonmel with regard to quarterage'.⁶⁶ One month later, the Committee cited a similar dispute in Drogheda; mentioned the need to reimburse its agent 'for his trouble in attending the House of Commons and Privy Council during the progress of the last quarterage bill'; and officially resolved to 'assist the non-freemen of Clonmel in their legal opposition to the corporation of that town exacting quarterage from them'.⁶⁷ The Committee was able to offer financial and legal support to the non-freemen by retaining the necessary legal councils and, also, through the preparation, printing, and distribution of a parliamentary

⁶⁴ Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee*, i, p. 83 & Maureen MacGeehin, 'The Catholics of the Towns and the Quarterage Dispute in Eighteenth-Century Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies*, viii (1952), 105.

⁶⁵ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 16-17.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

petition in December 1773. This petition included the names of merchants and manufacturers from all of the cities and towns affected by the proposed quarterage bill and claimed that 'the said heads of a bill, if passed into a law, will greatly discourage the trade and manufactures of this kingdom by imposing a tax on industry; and tend to create feuds, jealousies, and animosities amongst his Majesty's subjects'.⁶⁸

The national nature of the quarterage dispute, which was ultimately decided in favour of the non-freemen by the Irish Privy Council, permitted the Catholic Committee in Dublin to foster relationships with Catholics throughout Ireland. The minute book contains the requests of Catholics from Drogheda, Clonmel, Cork, Limerick, Waterford, Enniskillen, Cashel, and Dungarvan to be represented by sitting members of the Committee. The ongoing activities of the Committee also encouraged increased organisation, including fundraising among their Dublin constituents of 'no less than two shillings and eight pence halfpenny per [year]'⁶⁹ as well as a standardisation of practice, which involved choosing officers, an agent, and two treasurers by ballot. Overall, therefore, the debate over quarterage payments contributed greatly to the growth of Catholic activism and the evolution of the Catholic Committee. Unfortunately, however, as Maureen Wall has stated, and the minute book supports, the Committee was drawn into and adversely affected by the debate over the finalised test oath of 1774. Wall claims that 'the Catholic Committee was at once split into jurors and non-jurors and ceased to function as a committee for the next three years',⁷⁰ while in the minute book there is the repeated insertion of 'no business done'

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁷⁰ Maureen Wall, 'Catholic Loyalty to King and Pope in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' *Proceedings of the Irish Catholic Historical Committee – 1960* (1961), 22.

between July 1774 and April 1775, which is later followed by a blank gap between the years of 1775 and 1778.⁷¹

During this period, while the Catholic Committee was officially inactive, other Irish Catholic activists continued to participate in popular politics. In January 1777, Roman Catholics prepared an address for the departing Irish Lord Lieutenant, which gratefully acknowledged the passage of the Test Oath Act. One month later these same Catholics presented a second address to the new incoming Lord Lieutenant Buckinghamshire, which expressed their gratitude 'for that lenity which has been extended to us ever since the happy accession of his Majesty's illustrious family'.⁷² Also, a parliamentary election occurred in 1776, the first to be held since the passage of the Octennial Act in 1768. Catholic activists were pleased to witness the return of a pro-Catholic party within the Irish parliament, a phenomenon which held important ramifications for the future success of the Catholic cause.

As early as 1777, popular politicians, MPs, and government officials had begun to discuss the possibility of further Catholic relief legislation. In one popular petition to the king, a renewed request was made for a relaxation of the laws involving Catholic mortgages, as previous attempts at a mortgage bill had failed. Similarly, before the end of the year, Secretary of State Weymouth directed Lord Lieutenant Buckinghamshire to consider a measure to satisfy the Irish Catholics. These actions took place during an escalation of hostility between Britain and the American colonies and their continental ally, France; and they also occurred in conjunction with a proposed bill for the relief of English Catholics. After this Catholic relief bill had passed through the British House

⁷¹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 23-28.

⁷² J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 184 [address signed on 13 February, appeared in newspapers on 11 March 1777].

of Commons in May 1778, MP Luke Gardiner announced his intention to introduce the heads of a bill for Catholic relief in the Irish parliament as well.

The Irish legislation, which was presented on 5 June 1778, benefited from the support of the pro-Catholic party in the Irish parliament and successfully passed through both houses. In addition to wartime considerations to secure Catholic loyalty and raise regiments while battling the traditional Catholic rival of France, the Irish and British governments may have sought to reward or to support the Irish Catholic gentry. In April 1778, Catholic clergy and gentry had transmitted an address of loyalty to the king, pledging 'to exert our influence ... to confirm the lower class of people in a steady adherence to ... duty, fidelity, and allegiance'.⁷³ Similarly, during the parliamentary debates of 1778, the government indicated an interest in encouraging the local leadership of the Catholic gentry, which had been helpful in securing peace during the rural Whiteboy disturbances of the 1760s. Accordingly, therefore, the primary rewards contained in the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 were intended to benefit Irish Catholic landowners and tenants. Catholic land inheritance rules were adjusted, permitting land owning gentry to dispense with the gavel law and to preserve entire estates intact, and rental leases were extended to a maximum term of 999 years, encouraging increased investment and land development. These provisions required the swearing of the oath of allegiance of 1774 and went into effect in November 1778.

Modern historians and eighteenth-century writers have provided greater insight into the actual social effects and implications of this relief bill by noting that the provision of long leases could benefit Catholic middlemen. In considering County Tipperary, T. P. Power has stated that 'the 1778 act is important in the local context for a select group of Catholics who took perpetuity or long leases in the 1780s, who

⁷³ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), pp. 12-13 [April 1778, '*National Address of Loyalty*'].

benefited materially from the moderate rent levels ... and from the profit rents from subletting'.⁷⁴ Similarly, in a series of observations published in the *Dublin Evening Post* on 11 August 1778, one contemporary eyewitness provided an additional motive for the Protestant parliamentary support for the measure:

[The Protestant gentry], by extravagance and other means, are become very needy. In the present calamitous situation of affairs, there were few purchasers for their lands and they knew if this bill passed it would raise the price and increase the number of bidders. We may say of buyers, for though the act enables them only to take leases, yet it is well known the rent may be so fined down as to amount to very little less than a purchase.⁷⁵

Overall, therefore, the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 helped to secure the positions and property of the Catholic gentry; encouraged an increased number of Catholics to subscribe to the test oath to benefit from the legislative relief; and, additionally, permitted Catholics to divert wealth obtained through trade into land speculation, investment, and improvement, while helping to support the entire Irish economy.

The Catholic Committee Minute Book opens after an extended gap with two entries in March 1778, both of which were primarily concerned with the renewed threat of a quarterage bill and the Committee's latest efforts to oppose it, including a new parliamentary petition of non-freemen, but without any mention of a measure for Catholic relief. Following these two March records, however, the minute book contains an entry on 25 June 1778 which demonstrates a significant departure from all previous practice. At the same time that the Catholic gentry of Ireland were anticipating legislative relief through the act of 1778, leading Catholic gentlemen became strongly involved in the political activities of the Catholic Committee. Although no evidence exists to suggest that the Committee had participated in the creation of the Catholic

⁷⁴ T. P. Power, *Land Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary*, p. 143.

⁷⁵ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 191.

relief bill, following its successful introduction, the landowning classes of Catholics became interested in and devoted to the Catholic cause at an almost unprecedented level.

In June 1778, mere weeks after the initial appearance of the Irish Catholic relief bill in parliament, Irish Catholic gentlemen, including the Lords Kenmare, Fingall and Gormanston, joined with the merchant-class members to support the popular Catholic cause. From the onset of their involvement, these Catholic gentlemen took an immediate lead in Committee affairs, appointing themselves to a select committee along with other stalwarts, such as Charles O'Connor, John Curry, D. T. O'Brien, and Thomas Braughall, and giving themselves wide-ranging powers over official finances and expenditures. Two of the most significant innovations made by this new aristocratic leadership over the following several months included the acquisition of 'a resident agent in London to transact our lawful business there' ⁷⁶ and an application to other Irish Catholic clerics and gentlemen to raise money and broaden the membership base of the Committee. These new Catholic gentry leaders appreciated the constant need for fundraising to support the Committee's ongoing operations and turned to the Catholic community for assistance. In February 1779, the Committee transmitted a circular letter and a printed paper to the important Catholic prelates of Ireland. In this national circular, the Committee expressed its appreciation for the recent Catholic Relief Act, while explaining the necessity for its new political tactics:

⁷⁶ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 32 [Wednesday, 11 November 1778].

It was judged expedient to establish a fund for maintaining a resident agent in London, to act on behalf of the Roman Catholics of this kingdom, and to make a provision also for the incidental charges which cannot but occur in the case of a people reduced to the necessity of more exertions than any other body among us to subdue old prejudices and convince men in general how closely the public interest is connected with the relief of the Roman Catholics.⁷⁷

In the attached paper, the Committee went into even greater detail about the events in England during the progress of the Catholic Relief Bill of 1778, including the crucial contribution of allies in London and the invaluable lessons that Irish Catholic activists learned about possessing funds sufficient to support the Committee's popular political activities:

Money is an ingredient indispensably necessary ... upon the late transactions there was a considerable expense unavoidably incurred – upwards of two thousand pounds ... and if some of our principle gentlemen had not happened fortunately to have been in London at a critical time and with a spirit truly laudable engaged themselves for the procuring it, our affairs might have suffered exceedingly or perhaps have entirely miscarried.⁷⁸

At the end of the 1770s and the start of the 1780s, therefore, the Catholic Committee underwent a rapid evolution. Influenced by the participation of landed gentlemen, who had acquired a heightened appreciation for the requirements of popular politics, the Committee extended the scope of its activities. Rather than merely supporting the rights of Irish Catholics engaged in local legal disputes, the Catholic Committee instead undertook to encourage the passage of new parliamentary relief legislation. Tactics that had previously been largely defensive in nature suddenly assumed a slightly more pro-active character as the Committee secured a permanent agent to support the Irish Catholic cause in London; extended its membership base as a

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 36 [Friday, 26 February 1779, 'Copy of the Letter to the Prelates'].

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 38 ['Copy of the Printed Paper Sent with the Letter to the Prelates'].

means to raise additional funds; and maintained a visible public profile through the regular presentation of loyal addresses and the publication of official resolutions.

The aristocratic leadership, while successfully extending the activities of the Catholic Committee, remained aware of societal norms and appropriate measures for popular politics. Seizing every opportunity to pronounce their loyalty and obedience to royal government publicly, new addresses were transmitted in July 1779 to the king and to the Irish Lord Lieutenant. Moreover, the Committee prepared loyal addresses for all incoming and departing Lords Lieutenant throughout the 1780s. While these measures were adopted partly as a result of the unstable environment prevalent during the American War of Independence, the Committee also considered them to be part of a sound and logical policy, which would guarantee further Catholic relief. In conjunction with this tactic, the Catholic Committee considered making a public statement of opposition to the threat of mob violence in Dublin in response to the Gordon Riots in London in 1780 and, also, publicly expressed outrage over an anonymous pamphlet, which appeared in 1781 drawing attention to 'the injustice of the prejudices entertained against [Roman Catholics] ... and of charging a collective body of people with the crimes of individuals or ancestors'.⁷⁹ The traditional, conservative Catholic gentlemen who constituted the leadership of the Catholic Committee objected to this type of direct and provocative language, which seemed to them 'disloyal' and 'seditious' and, therefore, required their immediate censure.⁸⁰

While maintaining respectful propriety, the Catholic Committee continued to seek further Catholic relief. In the circular letter transmitted to Catholic prelates in 1779, the Committee expressed its hope that 'the grievous penalties on the Irish Catholic clergy in the exercise of their religion will be repealed in our own parliament

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 62 [11 November 1781, '*Advertisement to the Roman Catholics of Ireland*'].

⁸⁰ Ibid.

as those on their brethren in England have been repealed lately'.⁸¹ This wish was later realised in the second of Luke Gardiner's Catholic Relief Acts. In 1782, Gardiner presented a bill for the further relief of Irish Catholics. Similar to the Relief Act of 1778, this bill had been preceded by British legislation; was justified by wartime considerations; was contingent on the oath of 1774; and was supported by pro-Catholic MPs in the patriotic Irish parliament, which had witnessed the end to Poyning's Law and the start of Irish legislative independence. Some of the most important provisions included in the Catholic Relief Act of 1782 were rights to purchase land and to found and teach schools. The legislation was also extremely important in providing legal recognition to the Catholic Church in Ireland and in granting security to Catholic regulars and clerics without imposing state control over clerical appointments.

While the Catholic Committee had had limited involvement in the preparation of the bill, merely resolving to defend the rights of Catholic regulars and pledging to visit with Irish MPs 'to inform them of the very favourable sentiments they have of their regular clergy',⁸² certain members of the Catholic clergy had taken an advisory role in the formation of the legislation. As a personal friend to Luke Gardiner, the Catholic Bishop of Ossory, John Thomas Troy, had helped to ensure the inclusion of the necessary provisions granting unprecedented security, acceptance and independence to the Catholic Church in Ireland. Later, Troy also took responsibility for founding the legally recognised Catholic school of St. Kierans's College in Kilkenny. In May 1782, the Committee expressed national Catholic sentiments by transmitting an official address of gratitude to Gardiner and the Irish parliament, 'to express the high and grateful sense they entertain of their obligations to a wise and beneficent legislature

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 36 [Friday, 26 February 1779, '*Copy of the Letter to the Prelates*'].

⁸² Ibid., p. 65 [24 February 1782].

which has recently granted to them stability of property and toleration of religion in their native land'.⁸³

At the start of the 1780s, Catholic activists believed that legislative relief and the repeal of the penal code would occur naturally in conjunction with Irish Catholic obedience and the emergence of a new, more tolerant age. Although Catholics were able to cite the two recent relief bills as evidence of this trend, their optimism may have been naïve as other considerations may have had a greater influence on the Irish government's pro-Catholic policy. Mere weeks after the introduction of the second Catholic relief bill, the Catholic Committee received a letter politely requesting a Catholic contribution to the Royal Navy:

The [Irish] House of Commons last night voted twenty-thousand seamen ... It is in the power of the Roman Catholics to exert themselves on this occasion ... We, therefore, submit the following proposals to the Committee of the Roman Catholics ... that the Committee should write circular letters to such persons who have influence among the people of your persuasion all over Ireland to induce them to use their utmost endeavours to procure such young men or boys above the age of thirteen years as are effective and can be spared from the necessary labour of the country.⁸⁴

The Committee replied to this request with an enthusiastic desire to demonstrate its loyalty, only expressing the single concern that 'the Roman Catholics engaged in his Majesty's naval service shall not be obliged to renounce or conceal their religion'.⁸⁵

In spite of the Committee's proud display of patriotism and its repeated attempts at winning royal favour through the transmission of loyal addresses, with an end to the war in 1783 and the installation of a new administration at Westminster, additional Irish Catholic relief became either unimportant or undesirable to the British and Irish governments. The newest Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Duke of Rutland, arrived in

⁸³ Ibid., p. 70 [7 May 1782, To the Right Honorable Luke Gardiner and John Dillon, Esq.].

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 75 [1 June 1782, From Luke Gardiner and John Dillon to Lord Gormanston].

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 77 [11 July 1782].

Dublin in the spring of 1784 and remained in office until the end of 1787. Eamon O'Flaherty has suggested that Rutland may have contributed to the lack of Irish Catholic progress and that this official was 'suspicious of Catholics'.⁸⁶ Additionally, in the mid 1780s, other popular groups, such as the Volunteers and rural Rightboys, may have discouraged further legislative relief. The Volunteer regiments, which had been raised to provide defence for Ireland during the recent war, split over the Catholic cause with some Volunteer groups becoming aggressively outspoken against the Catholics and others speaking out in favour of the Catholic cause. These Volunteers made claims on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, which the conservative leaders of the Catholic Committee were prompt to refute. The Committee denied advanced knowledge of the Volunteers' plans, publicly opposed their inaccurate statements, and simultaneously insisted, 'we have for several years past, on all public occasions, been the medium through which the voice of the Roman Catholics of Ireland has been conveyed and the only one competent thereto'.⁸⁷ Moreover, in the south of Ireland lawless gangs known as the Rightboys expressed their opposition to taxes and tithes through violent acts of disorder. Although this demonstration of anti-clericalism was primarily directed against the Catholic clergy, which ultimately lost power and authority in certain parts of the kingdom, it may have also influenced Irish officials and legislators.

Throughout the remainder of the decade, therefore, the Irish Catholic cause experienced very little advancement. Partly as a result of the Relief Act of 1782 and under the leadership of the new Archbishop of Dublin, John Thomas Troy, Catholic religious leaders met and continued the nationwide improvement of Catholic education. Also, the Catholic Committee continued to meet in Dublin, transmitting loyal addresses and holding regular elections, which resulted in the returns of new, wealthy, merchant-

⁸⁶ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 102.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88 [15 November 1783].

class activists, such as Edward Byrne, John Keogh, and Richard McCormick, all of whom were attending meetings by 1785. Frustrated by its lack of progress, however, on 9 September 1788 a select committee from the Irish Catholic Committee submitted a report calling for the establishment of a permanent sub-committee of twenty-five members, which ultimately included Lord Kenmare, Lord Fingall, Thomas Braughall, D. T. O'Brien, John Keogh, and Edward Byrne:

On many material occasions not considered of sufficient importance to require a meeting of the General Committee, the Catholic interests have not been properly attended to ... it will be expedient to appoint a sub-committee to watch over and manage the interests of the Catholics, procure necessary information, and act for the body.⁸⁸

Writing to the Irish Chief Secretary, Thomas Orde, in 1786, the Catholic Archbishop of Cashel expressed a sense of frustration similar to the Catholic Committee, which exemplified widespread Irish Catholic disappointment in the late 1780s, 'it would have been a consoling insurance that succeeding sessions [of parliament] would at last liberate us from every remnant of those badges of suspicion'.⁸⁹ Unfortunately, however, during the final two years of the decade both the French Revolution and the British Regency Crisis distracted royal government and helped to obstruct further Irish Catholic relief. Meanwhile, in England, a group of Catholic activists succeeded in communicating with Prime Minister Pitt and advancing their cause at Westminster. Encouraged by the success of this English Catholic Committee and determined to overcome the inertia which had become prevalent in Dublin, Irish Catholic activists concluded that the perfect moment had arrived for a new exertion. At the start of the 1790s, therefore, the Catholic cause experienced a

⁸⁸ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 110 [9 September 1788].

⁸⁹ P. O'Donoghue, 'The Catholic Church and Ireland in an Age of Revolution and Rebellion, 1782-1803' (unpublished PhD thesis, UCD, 1975), p. 122 [Archbishop Butler to Orde, 10 March 1786].

significant reawakening in Ireland and the Irish Catholic Committee undertook to launch a brand new popular political campaign for the further relief of the Roman Catholics.

CHAPTER THREE

A New Beginning for the Irish Catholic Movement: Motives and Obstacles

I

The Campaign of the Catholic Committee

At the start of the 1790s, the Catholic Committee of Ireland steered its activities in an unprecedented and innovative direction. The Committee decided to work for a relaxation of the penal code not only for the security of Catholic landowners and tenants or as a general benefit to Ireland, but because the legal restrictions themselves were harsh, unjust and detrimental to the Catholic community. The implicit claim of the early 1790s, therefore, included an assertion that was far bolder than any preceding claim, that the Catholics of Ireland were being treated poorly under the existing penal system and were deserving of some measure of relief.

In January 1790, the Irish Catholic Committee in Dublin wasted no time in concluding that the time was proper 'to take into consideration the best and most proper means to apply for further advantages for the Catholics of this kingdom'.¹ Both clerical and aristocratic leaders, such as Archbishop Troy and Lord Kenmare, were present at this meeting in addition to the merchant and professional members, such as John Keogh, Edward Byrne, Richard McCormick and Thomas Braughall. Although the decision was made by a core group of Dublin-based activists, it crossed class barriers, expressing the united sentiments of educated Catholics throughout Ireland. Moreover, one week later, on 26 January, the discussion was continued and a formal resolution was made declaring that the time had arrived 'for exertion on behalf of the Roman

¹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 115 [19 January 1790].

Catholics of Ireland'.² In conjunction with this resolution, a select committee of twenty-five members was authorised to draw funds and requested to locate suitable places for future meetings to support the Committee's new campaign. Finally, later that spring, elections were held to help ensure the equal inclusion of provincial towns and cities throughout the kingdom, which were frequently represented within the Catholic Committee by resident, Dublin-based individuals.

These actions were taken in conjunction with the recently reinvigorated campaign of the Irish Catholic Committee after several years of relative inactivity, wherein the Committee did little more than transmit addresses of loyalty and obedience. Within the first four months of 1790 the Committee undertook to push for relief from penal restrictions, to hold fresh elections, and to erect a more sturdy organisational structure. These endeavours were necessary before the Committee could effectively plot a course of action or take the initial steps towards the legislative relief which it sought. The humble addresses of loyalty congratulating and thanking the arriving and departing Lords Lieutenant, which had characterised the primary activities of the Catholic Committee in the 1780s, however, did not cease with the adoption of their newer agenda. In January 1790, the same month that their powerful resolutions had been made, the Committee extended a congratulatory address to Ireland's newest Lord Lieutenant, John Fane, the Earl of Westmorland.

Although the arrival of a new Lord Lieutenant in 1790 would later have a significant impact on the course of Irish politics, it did not act as the primary reason for the Catholic Committee to depart abruptly from its previous, standard political practices. Another extremely important development involved the ongoing efforts of the Catholics of England to engage the British administration at Westminster in an open

² Ibid., p. 116.



dialogue. As early as February 1788 the Catholics of England had transmitted a memorial to Prime Minister William Pitt requesting the redress of grievances.³ This resulted in a conference several months later in which Pitt expressed a willingness to comply with the Catholic request on condition that they supply a summation of modern Catholic principles about controversial topics, such as the deposing power of the Pope and keeping faith with heretics. These questions were to be answered by respected continental clerics and would hopefully clarify Catholic beliefs while overcoming outdated Protestant fears and prejudices.

The Catholic Committee of England transmitted these questions to several continental universities, including the Sorbonne, to obtain an acceptable consensus for the British government. The clerical responses were received and presented to Pitt before the end of the year, acting as a crucial aid in explaining eighteenth-century Catholicism to the British administration. It was demonstrated that none of the clerical authorities could claim that the Pope or Church of Rome possessed any civil authority within the realm of England; could absolve British subjects from an oath of allegiance to the king; or would prevent British Catholics from keeping faith with Protestants. Ultimately, a formal list of principles based on these replies was prepared by the English Catholic Committee and was entitled '*The Protestation*'. This document was signed by over fifteen hundred English Catholics and, in May 1789, was presented to the British parliament by Sir John Mitford.

While *The Protestation* was being prepared, the English Catholics were also involved in drafting a bill to repeal laws in force against them. The English Catholic Committee had met in April 1788, several months before *The Protestation* was laid before parliament for this purpose. Additionally, in conjunction with the intended bill

³ Charles Butler, *Historical Memoir of the English, Irish and Scottish Catholics Since the Reformation*, vol. iv (London, 1822), pp. 6-10.

and *The Protestation*, a new oath of loyalty was designed for English Catholics wishing to benefit from the new legislation. The ultimate result of these diverse political measures was an act, which finally granted a degree of relief to English Catholics in 1791.⁴

The changing attitudes of Pitt's government reflected liberal and progressive trends on the continent and in France. These important events at Westminster might have helped to encourage the Catholics of Ireland, leading them to believe that, with the incoming Irish Lord Lieutenant and anticipated changes in the Irish administration, the time had arrived to seek further relief. The progress made in England was known to the Catholic Committee and could have been partly responsible for the innovative resolutions made in January 1790. Thomas Bartlett has boldly asserted that the origins of the Irish Catholic relief acts of the 1790s 'are to be found in England', but he has also stated that there was no evidence that British ministers 'gave Ireland more than a passing thought when the affairs of English Catholics came up for discussion'.⁵

Archbishop Troy has left records in his personal correspondence of ongoing debates within the Irish Catholic Committee in February 1790, providing evidence of eighteenth-century Irish Catholic interest in English affairs. Troy described a desire among certain committee members to reproduce an oath of loyalty analogous to the oath designed by the English Catholics and based on *The Protestation*. In Ireland, however, the bishops restrained the laity and prevented the creation of a new oath, asserting clerical authority over spiritual matters.

⁴ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981).

⁵ Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd., 1992), pp. 121-3.

The bishops acknowledge the competency of the Committee to transact the temporal and political concerns of the body: but they will never give up their exclusive right to judge on points of religious doctrine: They are the natural guardians of religion.⁶

These conservative clerics maintained their own traditional leadership roles while supporting the authority of Rome and preventing an Irish version of the oath. In contrast, the more liberal, forward-thinking lay members, who espoused a different approach to Catholicism, were kept silent. The early existence of these rifts within the Irish Catholic Committee portended a serious issue, which would recur throughout much of the decade. Although certain Irish Catholic bishops disagreed with the theological points contained in *The Protestation*, Troy's letters clearly indicate the level of Irish interest in English events. While the debate developed over the plausibility of a new test oath, therefore, lay and clerical members of the Catholic Committee possessed up-to-date information on the intended plans for British legislation at the end of 1789 and this information may have helped to prompt the Committee's resolutions of January 1790.

After a final meeting on 10 April concerned with sending notice throughout the kingdom for the election of 'new representatives for the three years ensuing', ⁷ the Minute Book of the Catholic Committee abruptly stops, containing no further meetings or official activity until February 1791, when it announces the complete returns for the elections held the preceding year. In addition to re-electing many of the same familiar individuals, certain new names appear, including the doctors, Theobald McKenna, Thomas Ryan, and William James MacNeven, and prosperous merchants, such as Randall MacDonnell. Although the Minute Book mentions no official business before

⁶ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 109 [13 February 1790].

⁷ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 116.

the election results are listed on 9 February 1791, unofficially, the members of the Catholic Committee did enact additional business toward the end of 1790.

The most important and evident example of the Catholic Committee's continuing activity exists in the letters approaching influential men in Britain and Ireland and soliciting their aid as advisers and allies. R. B. McDowell has suggested that before the end of 1790, the Irish Catholic Committee was lobbying and asking the advice of Henry Grattan.⁸ His importance as an opposition leader in the Irish House of Commons had been amply demonstrated that year during the dramatic and extraordinary parliamentary session of 1790, in which Grattan and his Irish Whig Party had engaged in major attacks on the Irish administration, including unrelenting attempts to counteract the perceived growing influence of the royal government. Despite this Irish Whig opposition to administration, however, in 1790 they were not uniformly in favour of providing support for the burgeoning Catholic movement. Additionally, reliable evidence of Henry Grattan's possible participation is scarce and, at this stage, it would have been extremely limited.

Another significant surviving piece of evidence of the Catholic Committee's policy of outreach was preserved in the correspondence between Reverend Thomas Hussey and the Burke family. Reverend Hussey was an Irish Catholic who had been appointed chaplain to the Spanish embassy and, consequently, resided in London. His close relative, John Hussey, Baron of Galtrim, was an active member of the Irish Catholic Committee. In August 1790 John Hussey wrote to his relative in London on behalf of the Committee to request that the reverend solicit the assistance of Richard Burke for the Irish Catholic cause. This piece of correspondence between Ireland and Britain proved that during the summer of 1790 the Catholic Committee was involved in

⁸ R. B. McDowell, *Grattan - A Life* (Dublin: Lilliput Press Ltd, 2001).

an unofficial policy of outreach. It also indicated that the Committee intended to draft a petition to the Irish parliament and that they were concurrently considering some method to raise national awareness and 'to lay before their fellow subjects the impolicy of the severe restrictions under which they labour'.⁹

Richard Burke was recognised as a member of a leading Irish family which had historically supported the Catholic cause and from which further assistance might be requested. John Hussey's letter hinted at what role the Irish Catholic Committee envisaged for Richard Burke in the summer of 1790. Hussey suggested that Burke could modestly help lay 'the foundation of [Catholic] emancipation' by drawing up 'an appeal to the nation'.¹⁰ Seven days later Reverend Hussey communicated the Catholic Committee's proposal to Richard's father, the esteemed Edmund Burke, who later that same year would publish his highly influential *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which voiced his strong opposition to the principles of the French Revolution. The reverend's letter of 13 August also revealed the Committee's dual schemes for engaging Richard Burke and appealing to the Irish public by explaining that they reposed great trust in Burke, hoping that he would 'not only alter, but reject the whole [plan] as he may think necessary and form another according to his own ideas'.¹¹

The Catholic Committee apparently believed that the reputation, fame and name of the Burke family could be employed to raise the profile of their cause and legitimise their claim in England and Ireland. Although the committee members seemed to be primarily interested in either advice or a piece of writing from Richard Burke, their humble approach belied the importance with which he and his family were held and the value inherent in any contribution. The rewards to be gained from even the most

⁹ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vol. vi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 133.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

rudimentary expression of support would have, therefore, more than justified their exertions in what might otherwise have been considered a possibly unconventional approach.

Unfortunately, the full extent of Richard Burke's participation in 1790 remains ambiguous. Two surviving letters, from the Reverend Thomas Hussey to Burke on 28 August and from Baron John Hussey to Reverend Hussey on 3 September, show that Burke did indeed convey advice and directions to the Catholic Committee, which was described by the reverend as the 'excellent principles which you lay down'.¹² Moreover, from the letter of 3 September, Richard Burke clearly advocated the preparation of 'a dissertation by an irresponsible pen for which the body will not be accountable',¹³ but it does not appear that he had not yet offered to prepare one himself. Baron Hussey urged his relative in London to 'prevail on councillor Burke to undertake the forming that dissertation and the petition to Parliament'.¹⁴ Baron Hussey's letter from Ireland was forwarded to Burke on 9 September 1790 and in *Pieces of Irish History*, a retrospective work published in 1807 by Catholic Committee member, Dr. W. J. MacNeven, the author states that the Committee had prepared a petition to parliament 'in the latter end of 1790'.¹⁵ Due to the lack of surviving evidence, however, it is unclear whether or not Richard Burke made any literary contribution to this purported petition or to any public dissertation. The only certainty was that a correspondence between the younger Burke and the Catholic Committee of Ireland had been successfully opened.

¹² Ibid., p. 134.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government* (New York, 1807), p. 21.

The letters involving Richard Burke's participation in the affairs of the Catholic Committee are significant for an additional reason, their description of the impact of the French Revolution on Ireland. For example, Reverend Hussey illustrated the extent of the social change by the end of the summer of 1790:

Sublimated ... as men's minds are by the French disease ... one cannot foresee what a continuation of oppressive laws may work upon the minds of people; and those of the Irish Catholics are much altered within my own memory.¹⁶

These insights and concerns were also reflected by government officials reporting in September 1790 that the French 'have sent missionaries into many countries to preach the example of France and to teach mankind how ill they have been governed.'¹⁷ These observations provide the political background against which the new campaign of the Catholic Committee was started. In addition, they exemplify the perceptions and beliefs of leading officials in Britain and Ireland, who might have been confronted by this new Irish Catholic activism.

Although political events in France historically have been linked to the growth of Catholic activism in Ireland and historians have frequently drawn a causal relationship between the two, as demonstrated by the impact of the Catholic relief legislation in England, there may have been other, more immediate and local political events that contributed to this rise in 1790. One of the most significant events to affect Irish politics in the summer of 1790 was the prorogation of and subsequent elections to the Irish parliament, which were held between the months of April and June. Following the dramatic and divisive events which took place in the Irish House of Commons in the preceding year during the Regency Crisis of 1789, in 1790 opposition

¹⁶ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 134.

¹⁷ *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, i, 583 [Earl of Mornington to William Grenville].

leaders in Ireland undertook to introduce a programme of reform. The proceedings of this parliamentary session were later described by Henry Grattan's son as 'peculiar and interesting and ... conducted with great activity and public spirit'.¹⁸ Whig party members and other Irish MPs sought to restrict what they believed to be the corrupt growth of executive power by introducing a series of laws aimed at restoring balance and justice to Irish representation. Henry Grattan stated that his goal was 'to combat a project to govern this country by corruption'.¹⁹ Similarly, the influential Irish MP, J. P. Curran, exclaimed in the Irish House of Commons, 'when I see folly uniting with vice, corruption with imbecility; men without talents attempting to overthrow our liberty, my indignation rises at the presumption and audacity of the attempt'.²⁰

These multiple aggressive attacks on the Irish government were too threatening for the concerned and fearful new Irish Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Westmorland, who wrote to the Home Secretary at Westminster on 24 February to request a prorogation, believing 'it would be imprudent to continue this parliament another session'.²¹ This request was officially granted and the desired prorogation took place on 8 April 1790, followed by a dissolution of parliament. During the following several weeks, new parliamentary elections were held throughout the kingdom. The new parliament was duly returned to Dublin and sat during a brief two week summer session between 2 and 24 July before finally concluding for the season.

These national elections may have had unforeseen consequences that affected the Catholic community, which was simultaneously involved in conducting its own election of delegates to the Catholic Committee. In the diary of rural farmer James

¹⁸ Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, vol. iii (London: Henry Colburn Inc., 1841), p. 430.

¹⁹ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95* (Dublin, 1784-95), p. 57.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²¹ *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, i, 563.

Scully, despite taking relatively little notice of national politics in Dublin, he has provided a surprisingly thorough account of the local contests between parliamentary hopefuls in County Tipperary. For example, Scully reported that by 'the twenty-sixth [of May] the election ended in Clonmel'.²² The national parliamentary elections held in 1790, therefore, had a high enough profile to interest, concern and ultimately affect all of the classes and communities of Ireland, both franchised and unenfranchised.

In a pamphlet entitled *Vindication of the Cause of the Catholics of Ireland*, which was published two years afterwards by the Catholic Committee in December 1792, a clear explanation was provided for the pursuit of the parliamentary franchise:

In every county where electioneering contests recur, it continually happens, that Catholic tenants are, at the expiration of their leases, expelled and thrown upon the world with their miserable families, to make room for Protestant freeholders, whose votes may support the consequence of their landlords.²³

Moreover, several Catholic Committee members referred to these tragic conditions during the debates reported at a meeting of the Catholics of Dublin on 23 March 1792. John Sweetman claimed that Catholic tenants might be 'turned out to make room for Protestant voters'.²⁴ John Keogh also described the franchise as a 'shield of the poor' because a landlord 'must have votes to support himself and his connection at the next election ... and life itself is a calamity if it exceeds [the tenant's] lease'.²⁵ It may, therefore, be highly significant that a parliamentary election occurred during the spring of 1790 and that strongly-worded instructions accompanied the new county delegates to the Catholic Committee when the General Committee reassembled in Dublin in 1791.

²² National Library of Ireland, *Diary of James Scully*, MS 27, 571.

²³ *Vindication of the Cause of the Catholics of Ireland, Adopted, and Ordered to be Published by the General Committee, at a Meeting Held at Taylor's Hall, Back-Lane, December 7, 1792* (Dublin, 1793), p. 17.

²⁴ *A Report of the Debate Which Took Place at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at the Music-Hall, Fishamble Street, Friday, March 23, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

The Catholic Committee Minute Book cited the resolutions and instructions communicated from the several towns and counties of Ireland, which had returned delegates. These instructions included a desire that 'application be immediately made' for Catholic relief.²⁶ For example, the resolutions transmitted from the Catholics of Limerick adopted very strong language in expressing their desire for agitation for relief from 'the degraded situation which the policy of angry times has left us in – without political existence in the land of our birth'.²⁷ In response, the Catholic Committee resolved in early 1791 that 'in compliance with the instructions transmitted to us by the Catholics of Ireland application be made to parliament for a redress of their grievances'.²⁸ This fervent interest in immediate relief expressed by the nation-wide Catholic instructions may have been partly the result of local causes, such as tenant evictions prior to the 1790 parliamentary election. These tangible and concrete examples of mistreatment may have encouraged political activism and provided the Catholic communities of Ireland with more urgent and personal motives for seeking legislative relief.

Another possible factor contributing to the immediacy of the Catholic instructions may have been statements made by the Irish administration at the end of 1790. Both Henry Grattan's son and Dr. MacNeven have mentioned an incident in which Lord Lieutenant Westmorland and his administration gave great offence to the Catholics of Cork in 1790. It was reported that the Lord Lieutenant visited the south of Ireland and upon his arrival in Cork he granted the local Catholics permission to express their affection and loyalty in the form of an address. Unfortunately, however,

²⁶ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 123.

²⁷ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 57.

²⁸ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 123.

this address concluded 'with the hope of some relaxation of the penal laws'.²⁹ It was, therefore, returned to the Catholics with the direction that prior to being presented to the Lord Lieutenant the offensive passage must be removed. As described in MacNeven's retrospective account, 'they refused to strike it out and declined presenting any address at all'.³⁰ Reports of this incident must have travelled throughout Ireland and helped to fuel Catholic activism. In combination with other factors, therefore, the administration's indiscreet actions in County Cork may have further encouraged the ongoing political campaign for relief.

Before the close of 1790, the Catholic Committee's original vague resolution to apply for some sort of further relief was intensified and focused on a clear objective. As the Committee sought the support of important men and worked to strengthen its own organisational structure, events in Ireland and abroad conspired to drive greater numbers of Irish Catholics toward activism. These small groups of concerned Catholics in the towns and counties of Ireland took a greater interest in the activities of the Catholic Committee in Dublin, ultimately communicating heated messages of encouragement, which advocated immediate relief. Prior to the first official meeting of the Committee in 1791, therefore, the groundwork had already been laid for a concerted plan to petition parliament and to appeal to the nation for a redress of grievances.

²⁹ Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 40.

³⁰ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of Their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 22.

II

The Setbacks of 1791

The first official meetings of the Catholic Committee in 1791 were very well attended events on 9 and 10 February, replete with both the newly elected and the re-elected Catholic delegates. Over seventy members were recorded in the Minute Book at the gathering on 10 February, including Catholic merchants, professionals and clerical leaders, such as Archbishop Troy and Archbishop Butler, while certain members of the Catholic gentry, such as the Earl of Kenmare, were conspicuously absent. The tone of these meetings was concerned, but optimistic, as the Irish Catholic Committee launched into its new campaign with a strong belief in the benevolent and 'progressive liberality of the times'.³¹ This zeitgeist was later described by Henry Grattan Jr. as 'a friendly and conciliatory disposition [which] pervaded all classes throughout the country'³² and was captured by contemporary statements in the *Dublin Chronicle* in the summer of 1791:

Fortunately we have got out of the trammels of bigotry ... The power of the Pope is gone in France, no one can dread it in Ireland but an hypochondriac and all that his terrors can excite is laughter.³³

This positive belief in the liberality of the age was similarly reflected in an important and early pro-Catholic pamphlet, which was written by the educated Catholic activist and Committee member, Dr. Theobald McKenna, 'The cant of the present day is liberality of sentiment and conduct; as twenty years back it was the dangers of popery

³¹ Ibid., p. 21.

³² Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 32.

³³ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 277.

and the necessity of preventing the growth of it'.³⁴ Published in January 1791, one month before the well-attended Catholic Committee meetings of February, the pamphlet provided McKenna with a vehicle for defending the Irish Catholics and supporting their cause. He couched his arguments in terms of the benefits for Ireland - 'disfranchisement of the great body of the Irish people retards the cultivation and natural improvement of the island'³⁵ - as well as the latent immorality and illegality of the penal code system that imposed restrictions on Catholics, which he considered to be a 'national tragedy':

Equal justice is not distributed to every order of Irishmen; in consequence of the inducements to court the favour of one party there is, with regard to those who constitute a chosen cast, a laxity in the execution of the criminal code ... It is needless to add that laxity to the one implies unequal vigour to the other.³⁶

Although McKenna provided a very outspoken and stark social critique, openly advocating Catholic enfranchisement and condemning several intrinsic aspects of Irish society, he intentionally avoided abstract considerations, such as claims of right, which he realised 'may be distorted to subvert any government'.³⁷ McKenna expressed himself without fear of hostile recrimination, as a reformer with full confidence in his progressive age. The other Catholic Committee members acted with a similar positive enthusiasm one month later when a decision was made to lay their grievances immediately before the Irish parliament.

In order for the Catholic Committee to function smoothly, however, it was necessary to employ the established practice of forming a sub-committee. It was clear that since seventy members constituted an unwieldy number, a smaller sub-committee

³⁴ Theobald McKenna, *Political Essays Relative to the Affairs of Ireland, in 1791, 1792 and 1793* (London, 1794), p. 15.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

of roughly one or two dozen members would be necessary to transact business and make decisions. For this reason, between 10 and 18 February, a small sub-committee of only eight members took sole responsibility for preparing a report summarising the national instructions and laying plans for the immediate future. This method of organising Committee functions involved delegating important decisions to a core sub-committee, which would then later make specific recommendations to the full General Committee. In most instances, the sub-committee's suggestions were followed willingly, with the full Committee contributing comparatively little to the final outcome. When actual disagreement occurred, dissenting individuals could be disregarded or excluded. In this way, the sub-committee members took and held the reins of Catholic activism, determining measures, plotting courses of action, and steering the overall direction of the Catholic Committee in the 1790s.

On 18 February the sub-committee of eight presented its report. The members of this sub-committee, which had been appointed on the 10th of the month, included Keogh, Byrne, Braughall, McCormick, Ryan and McDonnell, activists who were mostly middle-class merchants or professional men of business. Their report opened by reaffirming Catholic obedience to the crown and swiftly turned toward an historical demonstration of Catholic loyalty. Before concluding, the report called for Catholic grievances to be laid before parliament. Unlike McKenna's pamphlet, no specific measures or requests were cited beyond their being 'restored at least to some of the rights and privileges which have wisely been granted to others who dissent from the established church'.³⁸ Although, the authors of the report were also careful to express the 'submissive and constitutional manner' with which they believed an appeal should proceed, they refused to shrink from powerful depictions of Irish Catholics as 'strangers

³⁸ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 123.

in their native land' existing in a 'degraded situation'.³⁹ This report, therefore, voiced the sub-committee's belief in the injustice of the penal restrictions laid upon a loyal and peaceful community, which had become unfairly burdened and oppressed. It was couched in terms of humility, but it also expressed optimism in the age and a genuine faith in the Irish government:

in the plentitude of power, strength and riches of the British Empire, when nothing they grant can be imputed to any motives, but those of justice and toleration; that, at such a period, they deign to hear and relieve their oppressed and faithful subjects ... they will show to all Europe, that humble and peaceable conduct and dutiful application, are the only true and effectual methods for good subjects to obtain relief from a wise and good government.⁴⁰

This faith and optimism was still apparent several weeks later, when the sub-committee decided to lay its plan before the Irish administration in Dublin Castle with hopes of support during the ongoing parliamentary session. This intention was first recorded in the Catholic Committee Minute Book on 1 March 1791. Two weeks later Lord Lieutenant Westmorland sent a letter to Westminster informing the Home Secretary that 'the Catholics of Ireland have desired to wait upon [Chief Secretary] Mr. Hobart with their petition to parliament'.⁴¹ Following a meeting on 13 March, he also forwarded copies of the intended petition and resolves.

The actual proceedings of this official meeting have been very well documented both by Irish officials and Catholic Committee members. Despite the Committee's attempt at thorough organisation and careful propriety, an extraordinary rift developed within the sub-committee resulting in an embarrassingly botched interview. Even the Lord Lieutenant at the Castle was aware several days earlier that 'Lord Kenmare had

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/34/1 [*'At a Meeting of the General Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, 18th February, 1791'*].

⁴¹ HMC, Fortescue MSS (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, i, 40.

endeavoured to stop [the lower Catholics] without effect' ⁴² from applying to the administration. Similarly, the Committee explained many weeks afterwards in an official publication that within the twelve member sub-committee appointed to transact business, two individuals, Lords Fingall and Kenmare, would not agree to the present course of action and 'declined complying with the direction which they had received'.⁴³

These two Catholic gentlemen differed from most of the other sub-committee members, including Keogh, Byrne, McCormick, Ryan, McDonnell, Braughall, and McKenna, who represented the professional and merchant classes. These socio-economic differences became significant and pronounced when the sub-committee attempted to advance the Catholic cause. Following the precedent set by their efforts in the 1780s, the Catholic gentry preferred to avoid any hint of confrontation or aggression, relying instead on displays of patience and goodwill supported by expressions of loyalty and obedience. Kenmare and Fingall, therefore, maintained that the time was not right for an interview with the administration or political exertion by the Catholic Committee and that their previous good behaviour was an adequate gesture to ensure the gift of relief by a just and tolerant legislature.

Although the two lords had failed to negotiate or participate in the preparations for the planned interview with Chief Secretary Hobart on 13 March, at the last moment they decided to attend. The result of this rift, therefore, was a disorganised interview in which Lord Kenmare attempted to declare 'intentions' to the Chief Secretary which were materially 'different from what they [the Committee] had resolved upon'.⁴⁴ The other sub-committee members, however, came prepared to deal with this unexpected action and were able to produce a list of clear resolutions for the administration

⁴² Ibid., p. 39.

⁴³ *Transactions of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, During the Year 1791* (Dublin, 1792), p. 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

detailing the political programme of the Catholic Committee. The majority of the sub-committee stridently defended this decision in a pamphlet published later that spring:

It became incumbent on your Committee to produce some authentic document, to show that in presenting themselves before his Majesty's Ministers, they were not an obtruding, self-created Deputation, nor even the Delegates of a numerous body of Catholics assembled in the metropolis, but that they were authorised to act on behalf ... of their brethren through the kingdom.⁴⁵

The Catholic Committee fully acknowledged that it had surprised the two lords with these resolutions of which they had had no prior knowledge, but it still contended that 'it was an object of indispensable necessity' in 'the interest of the Catholic cause'.⁴⁶ To salvage his reputation and preserve some degree of influence, Lord Kenmare wrote to Hobart two days after the meeting to disclaim any previous knowledge of the resolutions and to beg that both he and Fingall 'not be considered by our presence there as parties or approvers of such proceedings; had we foreseen them we should not have been there'.⁴⁷

According to the later recollections of Chief Secretary Hobart, these resolutions may have included some list of actual grievances: 'in a paper put into my hands [the Catholic Committee] requested government to select such restrictions from which the Roman Catholics might be relieved'.⁴⁸ Although this approach may have seemed far too forward for the more obsequious Catholic aristocracy and gentry, Hobart himself did not admit to feeling offended. Instead, he insisted that 'it was the cordial disposition of administration to comply with their wishes, but it was not possible for

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁷ National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/33/237 [Kenmare to Hobart, 15 March 1791].

⁴⁸ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 - 93*, VIII A/1/3], p. 220.

government to point out specifically what parliament might grant'.⁴⁹ At this point, therefore, the Catholic Committee did not encounter any apparent opposition from the Irish government. Their most staunch opponents came from within the Committee itself and these dissenting, obstructionist individuals were thoroughly disparaged by the other sub-committee members. Recollecting these unfortunate events several years later, John Keogh insisted that the Catholic aristocracy's 'exertions were directly in opposition to our seeking redress' and that the embarrassing incident at the Castle interview with Hobart 'furnished them with a copious subject of ridicule'.⁵⁰

It is not surprising, given this in-fighting, that the Catholic Committee made comparatively little progress during the parliamentary session of 1791. There may, however, have been other less obvious factors that contributed to the Catholic setbacks of 1791. In addition to the unexpected resolutions at the March interview, the sub-committee delegates presented Chief Secretary Hobart with a copy of a petition that they had drafted and intended to lay before the Irish parliament. As with other Catholic Committee documents, this petition asserted the liberality of the age in contrast to a turbulent, distant past: 'the laws of which they complain were passed in a season of animosity ... and as the penalty of public opinions, which it is universally admitted do not at this day exist'.⁵¹ It also contained references to Catholic grievances, claiming that Irish Catholic subjects were 'precluded from almost every opportunity of improving the natural advantages of talents and connections'.⁵² Although this petition maintained a tone of humble obedience and made no specific requests, it was never placed before the legislature.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee*, i, p. ix [Appendix No. V, 'Mr. Keogh's Account of the Delegation of 1793'].

⁵¹ *Transactions of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, During the Year 1791* (Dublin, 1792), p. 3.

⁵² Ibid., p. 4.

In the spring of 1791 the principal reasons given for not presenting the Catholic Committee's petition involved the lateness of the season and the lack of time for adequate preparation. The Committee's official explanation, which was contained in their April publication, simply claimed that:

From the advanced period, however, of the session; from the difficulty of communicating in so short a time, with their respective political connections, or of bestowing on the subject that attention which its importance required, your sincerest well-wishers recommended to your Committee to postpone the intended application.⁵³

This encouraging rendition of events, which seemed reasonably accurate, did not imply even the most remote suggestion of malice or of opposition from any one associated with either the Irish administration or legislature. Similarly, Chief Secretary Hobart later claimed that the Committee 'resolved on the twenty-ninth of March 1791 to withhold their application for that session, which was likely to conclude in Ireland before the act could pass in Great Britain'.⁵⁴ Hobart's observation correctly revealed the importance of the English Catholic Relief Bill, which was finally read for the last time at Westminster in April 1791 and which would have influenced Irish activism. He, therefore, attributed the petition's postponement solely to a prudent decision by the Catholic Committee. This claim was additionally supported by Edward Byrne's letter of 29 March, which respectfully informed Hobart of the Committee's decision to withhold their petition for the season. Lord Westmorland's letter to Home Secretary Grenville, however, exposed slightly darker inducements: 'They wished Mr. O'Niel to present their petition, he had agreed, but, on conference with the speaker, he

⁵³ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁴ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 - 93*, VIII A/1/3], p. 220.

declined'.⁵⁵ In contrast to other official explanations, therefore, the Lord Lieutenant's unofficial letter directly implicated a leading member of the Irish administration, the Speaker of the House of Commons, suggesting that he may have acted discretely to discourage MP O'Niel and to prevent the petition's appearance before parliament, with or without the knowledge of the Irish Catholic Committee.

Ascertaining the actual attitude of the Irish government through its handling of Catholic activism in early 1791, therefore, is neither clear nor straightforward. The Chief Secretary repeatedly insisted that he sought to support the Committee, but, in his official communications with the Catholics, he confessed that 'they are led to suppose that government in their great concerns had not then decided whether they would now honor the Catholics with any or what support'.⁵⁶ Although Hobart's letters were 'perfectly polite', he was clearly feigning indecision and remaining noncommittal, neither discouraging outright nor truly assisting the cause of the Catholics. Lord Lieutenant Westmorland adopted a similar approach in March 1791, deciding that although, 'their desire seems that government should interfere in their favour; I should think it is to be wished that government should take as little part as possible'.⁵⁷ Westmorland also mentioned the anti-Catholic position of certain other cabinet members, such as Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon, and the perceived antipathy of the Irish parliament. This claim stood in direct opposition to the Committee's prevailing belief in the good-will of a progressive age, but may be supported by some surviving letters of Henry Grattan. According to one letter from Grattan, in the summer of 1791 Theobald McKenna was involved in an indirect communication with the Irish Whigs through a

⁵⁵ *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, i, 42 [Earl of Westmorland to William Grenville, 29 March 1791].

⁵⁶ National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/33/239-240 [24 March 1791, 'Memorandum of the Wishes of the Roman Catholics'].

⁵⁷ *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, i, 40 [Earl of Westmorland to William Grenville, 14 March 1791].

third party on behalf of the Catholic Committee. Although McKenna's intention was to secure the Whigs' future support, in the words of Henry Grattan Jr.:

The result of the application was that the Catholics were advised not to link themselves with the opposition, who could not carry their question, but to resort to the Lord Lieutenant's Secretary [Hobart].⁵⁸

Neither the government nor opposition parties were willing to adopt the controversial Catholic cause. Despite their efforts at securing supporters in Ireland, therefore, the delays suffered by the Committee in 1791 may have been partly the result of a widespread lack of interest or outright reluctance among members of the administration and the Irish parliament.

Trusting in their liberal and progressive age, and seemingly unaware of any government opposition, the Irish Catholic Committee returned to their far greater concern of internal dissent. Having decided to delay presenting their petition to parliament, the Committee was able to attend to the obstructionist Catholic gentry. In the months of April and May, therefore, while the Irish parliament was concluding its session, the Catholic Committee prepared and published a full account of the turbulent events of the preceding winter. This pamphlet informed the Catholics of Ireland of the reasons for the Committee's delay as well as detailing the startling behaviour of the two lords. The primary goal of this publication, which was entitled *Transactions of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, During the Year 1791*, was to justify and defend the decisions and actions of the Committee by illustrating events through powerful depictions: 'your committee with equal astonishment and regret heard the noble viscount [Kenmare] declare [intentions] in the name of the Catholics ... what views would have induced the noble lord to make such a declaration is difficult to

⁵⁸ Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 41.

conjecture'.⁵⁹ By laying Lord Kenmare's actions before the entire kingdom, the sub-committee sought public censure and condemnation of him that would vindicate its own course of action and prevent any future rifts.

In conjunction with publishing a public defence, the Catholic Committee assigned a sub-committee, including Keogh, Braughall, McCormick, and McDonnell, to reconsider the regulations governing the functions of the Catholic Committee. As a result of their deliberations, at a meeting on 13 May the sub-committee officially resolved that:

In any sub-committee appointed ... to apply for our relief, the majority of such sub-committee shall at all times decide the manner of application and the number of persons to be sent to the chief governor of this kingdom ... and that the minority of such sub-committee shall always acquiesce with the majority therein.⁶⁰

Clearly inspired by the botched interview with Hobart and directly aimed at the obstructionist Catholic gentry, this resolution sought to settle once-and-for-all the power struggle within the Catholic Committee and the developing rift between the previously omnipotent gentry and the more recently rising middle-class leadership.

The record of proceedings kept in the Catholic Committee Minute Book indicates that the General Committee continued to meet until 15 June 1791, but then did not officially reconvene again until the month of November. These final springtime meetings were primarily concerned with publishing and distributing accounts of the Committee's recent proceedings. Despite their official prorogation, however, certain committee members did engage in political activity during the subsequent four months.

Theobald McKenna was one Catholic Committee member who was especially active in 1791. The surviving correspondence of Henry Grattan provides

⁵⁹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 128.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

incontrovertible proof that McKenna was indirectly in contact with the Irish Whig Club in the month of July in order to communicate Irish Catholic intentions and to gain Whig assistance for their political demands. It was additionally claimed several months later by government officials that at this time McKenna had become involved with organisations propounding French-inspired radical ideas in Dublin. Looking back at the rise of a particular radical society, which was steadily securing a foothold in Ireland, Chief Secretary Hobart noted that 'among the members of this society were some of the Roman Catholic Committee and particularly Doctor Theobald McKenna'.⁶¹

McKenna's unsubstantiated interest in radical politics, however, would not have been uncommon at the end of 1791. A great deal of radical activity had been occurring in the spring and summer throughout Ireland. In May, for example, Lord Lieutenant Westmorland reported to Westminster that 'some money had been spent to circulate Paine's *Rights of Man* very cheap'.⁶² He further cited the circulation of 'dangerous papers' on 12 July. Finally, in an act which thoroughly blurred the lines dividing Catholic activism from the popular radical reformist fervour, a pamphlet appeared on 1 August entitled *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, which helped to wed the two hitherto separate movements.

The pamphlet's author, initially known only by the title 'A Northern Whig', insisted that reforming parliament, restraining the Irish executive, and relieving the kingdom's Catholics were causes that were inextricably linked:

⁶¹ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 92* VIII A/1/3], p. 221.

⁶² HMC, Fortescue MSS (MSs of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, i, 83 [Westmorland to Grenville, 26 May 1791].

If the whole body of the people unite with cordial sincerity, and demand a general reform in Parliament, which shall include restitution of the elective franchise to the Catholics, we shall then, and not otherwise, have an honest and independent representation of the people; we shall have a barrier of strength sufficient to defy the utmost efforts of the most profligate and powerful English administration.⁶³

This publication was neither written for nor by an Irish Catholic. The author, who later revealed his identity to be the Protestant reformer, Theobald Wolfe Tone, instead intended the pamphlet to appeal to Northern Irish Dissenters and other liberal Protestants. Although Tone prioritised legislative reform, he sought to convince his readers that adopting the Catholic cause was necessary as ‘they and the Catholics had but one common interest and one common enemy ... to assert the independence of their country and their own individual liberties’.⁶⁴ As an inevitable result of this publication, Tone came to the attention of the Irish Catholic Committee as a friend to their cause, helping to raise their profile and providing the movement with a significant boost.

Although Tone’s pamphlet succeeded in swaying liberal Protestant opinion, convincing many reformers that the Catholic cause was a legitimate extension of their own pre-existing determination to strengthen and reform the Irish legislature, not all Catholic activists reciprocated. With the notable exception of certain committee members, such as Richard McCormick, in 1791 the majority of the Catholic Committee did not adopt the cause of radical reform. They remained largely focused on their original aims of seeking a restoration of rights and relieving the suffering of the Catholics of Ireland through constitutional tactics. While other Irish activists entered into radical politics before the close of 1791, therefore, the Catholic Committee

⁶³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, vol. i (Washington D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1826), p. 365.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

remained committed to its own campaign and continued to proceed along a purely moderate, traditional, and peaceful path.

In order to prepare adequately for the upcoming parliamentary session of 1792, Catholic Committee members began considering options and devising tactics well in advance of the new year. A twenty-seven member sub-committee consisting of both Catholic aristocrats, such as Kenmare, Fingall, and Hussey, and middle-class merchants, including Keogh, Byrne, Braughall, McDonnell, McCormick, and McKenna, worked throughout the summer without any input from the General Committee to 'proceed in taking such steps as to them shall appear necessary for the purpose of soliciting a mitigation of the penal laws'.⁶⁵ The dual approaches taken by this sub-committee involved both a July meeting with the Chief Secretary and an autumn voyage to London.

On 16 July, an interview was held at the Castle simply to advise Hobart that the Catholic Committee intended to apply to parliament in 1792. The Committee continued to hope for the administration's support, presuming that by giving advance notice they were giving 'sufficient time to his majesty's ministers to consider and arrange a business of so much importance'.⁶⁶ Although they did not ask for anything specific, the sub-committee did present Hobart with a concise list of the penal laws then in force, which indicated their concerns. The Chief Secretary responded to the sub-committee by pleasantly assuring them that 'he would take the earliest opportunity to inform ... the Lord Lieutenant of the purport of the deputation'.⁶⁷

The second leg of the sub-committee's summer scheme involved the far more ambitious decision to solicit the aid of an agent in London to lobby the administration

⁶⁵ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 135.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

in England on behalf of the Irish Catholics. A logical choice for this position was the pro-Catholic Richard Burke. An application was made in the form of a letter from Edward Byrne to Richard Burke on 15 September to apprise him of the ongoing situation in Ireland and, very significantly, to introduce him to John Keogh, the Catholic Committee member deputed to go to England in order to transmit the correspondence. The letter recognised Keogh's 'zeal and unremitting attention to the business of the Committee', while explaining to Burke that 'he will give you a particular detail of our negotiations and of their present state'.⁶⁸ Many years later, John Keogh described the preparations for his journey by insisting that he alone had convinced the other more pessimistic sub-committee members of the necessity for this action:

I was of a different opinion, and pressed, that one of the Committee should be deputed to London to advocate their cause with the immediate ministers of the crown ... The proposal was of a novel, and thought to be of an idle nature, an emanation of an ardent, an enthusiastic, perhaps a disordered mind. They were persuaded that the minister would not receive their deputy ... the meeting was actually breaking up, and about to disperse forever, when I, and I alone, offered to go to London ... to solicit an audience from ministers.⁶⁹

Although this rendition of events may not be entirely incorrect, it does contradict the official report contained in the Catholic Committee Minute Book. In an entry dated 3 December 1791, an alternative explanation was provided that 'Mr. Keogh's ill state of health requiring him to pass through London on his way to the continent your sub-committee embraced the opportunity of confiding to him the business of arranging and

⁶⁸ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 397 [Edward Byrne to Richard Burke Jr., 15 September 1791].

⁶⁹ Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee*, i, p. x [Appendix No. V, 'Mr. Keogh's Account of the Delegation of 1793'].

conducting the negotiation'.⁷⁰ Although Keogh did suffer from ill health, which led him to seek respite on the continent at the end of 1791, his claim to have encouraged the other sub-committee members to adopt the plan may not have been inaccurate. Unfortunately, as Keogh was abroad in December 1791, he could not have refuted or contributed to the Committee's official resolutions, which were made in Dublin.

Either through his own determination or merely at the request of the sub-committee, John Keogh did successfully travel to London in September 1791 with hopes of soliciting Richard Burke's aid and of securing a meeting with British officials. While Keogh was away from Ireland, however, the entire political landscape of the kingdom was rocked by popular political activism on an almost unprecedented scale. This activity had an unexpected and significant effect on the Catholic cause and the Catholic Committee, which could no longer ignore the rise of political radicalism in Ireland. Following an energetic and optimistic beginning in 1790, therefore, the Committee's attempt to gain legislative relief was impeded by obstacles far greater than the mere dissent of two landed gentlemen. In the closing months of 1791 and at the start of 1792 a new era in Catholic activism was inaugurated, which tested the political resolve of the Irish Catholics and presented the Irish Catholic Committee with its strongest challenge to date.

⁷⁰ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 137.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Failure of Traditional Politics: Traitors and Sceptics

I

The Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin

The Catholic Society of Dublin was a relatively small fringe organisation founded in the autumn of 1791 and led by Catholic Committee member and outspoken activist, Dr. Theobald McKenna. The official stated purpose for this society was contained in its original, and much longer, name, the Society for Promoting Unanimity Amongst Irishmen and Removing Religious Prejudices. In addition to having a much smaller membership than the Catholic Committee, Theobald Wolfe Tone explained at the time that the 'The Catholic Society is not deputed by the body of the Catholics, nor by any other body; they have no manner of authority from them'.¹ It was essentially, therefore, no more than 'a mere private club'.²

The precise number and actual names of the members of the Catholic Society have remained an historical mystery. Although Lord Lieutenant Westmorland claimed in November 1791 that 'this society consists of fifty or sixty of the most violent agitators',³ he also admitted to Lord Grenville that 'it is very difficult to obtain intelligence of Catholic motions'.⁴ In the same month, leading Committee member Edward Byrne told Chief Secretary Hobart that McKenna and two other committee members were in the Catholic Society, but he insisted, 'I do not think I should be

¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 385-6.

² Ibid.

³ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/24 [Westmorland to Lord Dundas, 21 November 1791].

⁴ *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, i, 235 [Westmorland to Lord Grenville, 21 November 1791].

justified in naming them'.⁵ A brief reference contained in a newspaper record of a meeting of the society at Derham's on Essex Street on 21 December helps to shed some light on Byrne's confession by also naming Catholic Committee member, Thomas Braughall, who was confirmed as presiding over the meeting. McKenna himself later described the Catholic Society boldly as 'the first Irishmen of that persuasion, who ventured for a century past to look their bondage in the face and to enquire by what pretence it could be justified'.⁶

Although far smaller than the Catholic Committee and probably much shorter lived, the contribution of the Catholic Society to the cause of Irish Catholic relief was immense. Under McKenna's guidance and by his probable authorship, the Society published an extraordinary pamphlet in the autumn of 1791 simply entitled *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin*. This pamphlet, which bore little resemblance to any previous pro-Catholic publication because of its unabashed and shameless description of Irish Catholic dissatisfaction, proclaimed, 'if we have a crime it is to have slept over our chains – our cause is the cause of justice and our country'.⁷

As in McKenna's earlier writings, the declaration drew a correlation between the rights of Irish Catholics and the general state of Ireland, 'IT IS THE INTEEST OF EVERY MAN IN IRELAND THAT THE ENTIRE CODE SHOULD BE ABOLISHED'.⁸ Additionally, expressing a sentiment similar to that of the Society of United Irishmen, of which McKenna was a possible member in 1791, the declaration called for Irish unity.

⁵ National Archives of Ireland - Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Evan Nepean, 8 October 1792].

⁶ Theobald McKenna, *A Review of the Catholic Question, in which the Constitutional Interests of Ireland, with Respect to that Part of the Nation, are Investigated* (Dublin, 1791), p. v.

⁷ *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin* (Dublin, 1791), p. x.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

It is time we should cease to be distinct nations, forcibly enclosed within the limits of one island ... too long have we suffered ourselves to be opposed in rival factions to each other, the sport of those who felt no tenderness for either.⁹

The Catholic Society insisted upon employing legal and constitutional means for redressing grievances and professed a sincere affection for the constitution, '[Irish Catholics] earnestly solicit to participate in its advantages. Why suspect them of enmity to their country? They desire entirely to incorporate themselves with it'.¹⁰ Despite these assurances, however, the language adopted by McKenna in the declaration seemed aggressive to many contemporaries, who could not fail to appreciate the unprecedented and graphic descriptions of Catholic suffering, 'not accused of any crime; not conscious of any delinquency; they suffer a privation of rights and conveniences'.¹¹ Finally, the Catholic Society generated sufficient cause for controversy by overcoming a massive hurdle and closing the declaration with a call for 'the benefit of open trial and candid discussion' as a claim 'of right',¹² a claim never before openly advanced by any Catholic activist. McKenna decried, in concluding the declaration:

If in this enlightened age it is still our doom to suffer, we submit, but at least let us learn what imputation of crimes can instigate, or what motives of expedience can account for, the denunciation of that heavy judgement ... and entitle us to the kindness and confidence of our brethren; we may be at least instructed how we should atone for what we cannot deem inexpiable, – *The political errors or misfortunes of our ancestors*.¹³

⁹ Ibid., p. vi.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. vii.

¹¹ Ibid., p. iii.

¹² Ibid., p. x.

¹³ Ibid., p. x.

The *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin* caused an intense debate to erupt throughout the Irish capital on an unprecedented scale. Not for many years had the cause of Irish Catholics been the subject of such massive, public discussion. While Catholic activists and Irish officials may have been conscious of the many practical and political considerations relevant to the Catholic cause, before the Catholic Society's declaration the Irish public at large had remained unconcerned and disinterested. Afterwards, however, no one in Irish society could claim to be ignorant of the existence of a wider Catholic question. Although the Catholic Committee would certainly benefit from this significant rise in public interest and the Catholic cause would find itself suddenly propelled into the national consciousness, a natural side-effect was a simultaneous increase in the number of anti-Catholic publications. The *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin*, therefore, succeeded in arousing both greater interest and stronger opposition to Irish Catholic claims and thereby placed the Catholic Committee in a far more uncertain and hostile environment than ever before.

Following the publication of the Catholic Society's controversial declaration, most of the educated individuals in Dublin found themselves obliged to oppose openly or support publicly the pamphlet's sentiments. The actual date on the publication was 21 October, but as clarified by the Lord Lieutenant in a letter to Home Secretary Henry Dundas on 21 November, 'Though it bears date 21 October, it did not make its appearance within a few days'.¹⁴ It was not until the end of November 1791, therefore, that the Irish administration became aware of the Catholic Society's declaration and forwarded copies of it to British ministers at Westminster. Lord Westmorland correctly foresaw that 'if this association should be copied in other

¹⁴ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/24 [Westmorland to Dundas, 21 November 1791].

places, the alarm would be very serious on the Protestants'.¹⁵ Describing the significant effect of McKenna's pamphlet on conservative Irish Protestant opinion in a letter nearly one year later, Chief Secretary Hobart accurately captured the resulting backlash in late 1791:

The tone of demand in that pamphlet ... created very serious alarm in the minds of the friends to our present Constitution in church and state. Many leading men who before had been prepared for concession, similar to those which had been recently made by the British legislature, became averse to the making any concession whatsoever, foreseeing that what they had been disposed to yield, could not satisfy the Roman Catholics and could only enable them to make future demands with more capacity to insist.¹⁶

Public response was equally heated and swift. Within weeks of the pamphlet's publication, reactions were published and distributed throughout Dublin. In *Strictures on the Declaration of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Promoting Unanimity amongst Irishmen and Removing Religious Prejudices*, the anonymous author not only objected to the Catholic Society's aggressive tone, but claimed that it was 'exciting the Roman Catholics to perpetual dissatisfaction and discontent'.¹⁷ McKenna himself also became a direct target for public censure. He was attacked outright by being called 'an insignificant individual', who was responsible for a 'seditious resolution' and who had cleverly removed his own name from the publication as he had 'probably conceived that consideration might thus be given to his work, which if supposed to be the sentiments of respectable, though unknown characters, would be formidable; connected with its author would sink into contempt'.¹⁸ Critics were convinced that the Catholic Society's declaration would serve only to ignite passions and arouse Irish Catholic

¹⁵ Ibid., Letter 1/24 [Westmorland to Dundas, 21 November 1791].

¹⁶ National Archives of Ireland - Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Evan Nepean, 8 October 1791].

¹⁷ *Strictures on the Declaration of the Society Instituted for the Purpose of Promoting Unanimity amongst Irishmen and Removing Religious Prejudices* (Dublin, 1791), p. 38.

¹⁸ Ibid.

dissatisfaction, threatening the peace, prosperity and Protestant control of Ireland. Many of the Irish officials and MPs who had previously been able to acknowledge the disadvantaged position of Catholics in Irish society, therefore, were unprepared for those same Catholics to express their frustrations and to voice their own feelings in a manner which was so unusual and confrontational.

Irish Catholic activists and traditional leaders were equally divided over the declaration. Lord Westmorland correctly communicated in late November that the leading Catholics 'disapprove very much of this publication'.¹⁹ The Lord Lieutenant's observation specifically referred to the Catholic aristocracy and clergy, who remained thoroughly mistrustful and fearful of an infusion of French revolutionary principles. The Catholic Bishop of Ferns, James Caulfield, displayed these concerns when writing to Archbishop Troy on 28 November, 'We were puzzled enough by our Committee, but the diabolical spirit of the Jacobins will perhaps ruin us all. This frenzy for levelling is become epidemical and threatens the world with numberless evils temporal, as it throws everything into disorder and anarchy'.²⁰ Although Caulfield may not have been referring specifically to the Catholic Society, Archbishop Troy certainly was describing them one month later when writing to Archbishop Francis Moylan. In this letter, Troy expressed his negative opinion by stating, 'our Jacobin Catholic Society have voted a gold medal to Doctor McKenna'.²¹ The modern and confrontational style of Catholic activism thus alienated and concerned these traditional religious leaders even driving them willingly to disavow outspoken Catholic activists in support of obedience and loyalty in accord with the wishes of the Irish administration at Dublin Castle.

¹⁹ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/24 [Westmorland to Dundas, 21 November 1791].

²⁰ P. O'Donoghue, 'The Catholic Church and Ireland in an Age of Revolution and Rebellion, 1782-1803' (unpublished PhD thesis, UCD, 1975), p. 157.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

At the end of 1791, the Catholic Committee was similarly faced with the choice between denying or supporting the *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin*. The Irish administration had approached Catholic leaders in Dublin with the aim of obtaining a public disavowal. In the words of Lord Lieutenant Westmorland, who expressed his wishes and concerns on 21 November, 'I have some hopes [the considerable and moderate Catholics] may be prevailed on publicly to discountenance this association, though I fear they will not publicly manifest a schism in their body'.²² In accord with this scheme, in late November, Chief Secretary Hobart communicated the government's desire for a disavowal to the sub-committee of the Catholic Committee. He insisted that this action would be necessary 'in order to bring back the Protestants to a favourable disposition towards the Roman Catholics'.²³ On 24 November the sub-committee met to discuss Hobart's proposal and to draft a report relating to the Catholic Society's declaration. This report was then delivered to the Chief Secretary during a pivotal meeting which was held at Hobart's request on Saturday, 26 November 1791.

This very well documented event at Dublin Castle included the Chief Secretary himself, his personal secretary, Mr. Hambleton, who took comprehensive notes, and a deputation of four Catholic Committee members, Edward Byrne, Randall McDonnell, D. T. O'Brien, and John Roche. Both the Catholic Committee and Hobart have, therefore, provided posterity with extremely detailed accounts of the interview. In the Minute Book of the Catholic Committee the substance of the official meeting was contained in the record of a full assembly of the General Committee on 3 December, only the second such gathering to be held since June 1791. At this meeting, the sub-committee updated the General Committee as to its numerous activities over the

²² HMC, *Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, i, 235.

²³ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Evan Nepean, 8 October 1792].

preceding five months. The Minute Book contained the sub-committee's explanation for its actions and it described several details of the 26 November interview with Hobart. For example, it showed that in the prepared report, which had been handed to the Chief Secretary, it was effectively stated that the Catholic Committee was completely unconnected to the *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin*. Also, at the interview the deputation had insisted that they 'sincerely regretted that anything from or done by any of our [Catholic] body should be displeasing to government'.²⁴ They claimed 'abhorrence even to the idea of disturbing the peace or tranquillity of our country' and even admitted that the declaration may have been 'untimely or unproper'.²⁵ These sentiments, however, disappointed Hobart who had hoped for a complete renunciation of the principles contained in the pamphlet. In response to the Chief Secretary, the deputation insisted (despite not claiming responsibility for the work):

Unfortunately for us it contained truths as to our situation which we could not disavow and should we even attempt to condemn its publication or the authors of it, division and a paper war among ourselves would be the inevitable consequence.²⁶

When faced with an absolute choice, therefore, these members of the Catholic Committee felt obliged to uphold the essence of the declaration and to try to maintain Catholic unity.

According to the Minute Book this interview concluded with the deputation reaffirming its loyalty and re-emphasizing both Catholic oppression and social merit. It also showed that the four Catholic delegates implored Hobart to use his own influence to calm Protestant concerns, earnestly hoping that he would 'condescend to represent

²⁴ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 138.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

on our part, the hardships of our situation'.²⁷ When faced with a renewed request for government support, however, the Chief Secretary provided 'no decisive answer, but some allusion was made to the necessity of our own co-operation to enable government to serve us.'²⁸ Despite this vague and indecisive response in November, at the general meeting on 3 December the Committee maintained its faith in the Irish administration and insisted on graciously observing that 'although he avoided entering into any discussion relative to the grievances we complained of, yet his manner of receiving us was as polite and conciliating as our relation to the Catholic body required'.²⁹

The details of the official interview were also recorded by Mr. Hambleton and later communicated by Chief Secretary Hobart in a letter written on 8 October 1792. Hobart's recollections, however, stand in slight contrast to the Catholic Committee Minute Book. According to him, Edward Byrne described the Catholic Society's declaration as 'the performance of very few inconsiderate men of hot heads' further confessing that 'it is disapproved by all sensible men'.³⁰ Responding to Hobart's urging for the Catholic Committee to 'assert [its] own dignity' by disapproving of the proceedings of 'a society self-created',³¹ Byrne also explained that the Committee had been placed in a delicate situation by the appearance of the publication and feared confronting the authors because 'they are violent' and to exasperate them with any denunciation 'would only occasion more difficulty'.³² Finally, Byrne reassured Hobart that the Catholic Committee would attempt to undo the damage caused by the declaration by visiting Protestant gentlemen in their acquaintance 'to assure them of

²⁷ Ibid., p. 139.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Evan Nepean, 8 October 1792].

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

our disapprobation of that paper'.³³ He insisted that the Catholic Committee abhorred the 'levelling principles' of the French Revolution and would gladly 'abjure all such destructive principles in [an] oath of allegiance'.³⁴

The notes taken by Hobart's personal secretary, and later contained in his personal letter, indict D. T. O'Brien as well. Like Byrne, O'Brien denied any affiliation between the Catholic Committee and Catholic Society. He claimed that 'only the lower ranks' of Catholics would be influenced by the publication, whereas 'the sensible among us and those most respected will be thankful for anything that shall be done for us'.³⁵ O'Brien additionally described Theobald McKenna as 'a sanguine young man'.³⁶ and he assured the Chief Secretary that no further pamphlets would be published or distributed. Finally, like Byrne, O'Brien insisted that a public disavowal would 'only raise a greater flame and create a disunion among ourselves'.³⁷

Perhaps the most outspoken member of the delegation was Randall McDonnell, who was unlike his more inoffensive and reassuring associates in attempting to obtain some level of justice and to defend the rights of the Catholics of Ireland. McDonnell told Hobart quite frankly that Ireland's Catholics were indeed subjected to varied forms of discrimination. He voiced doubts over the future introduction of any legislative relief and frustrations at the obstacles created by the complaints of opponents. Finally, to the possible disappointment of the Chief Secretary, McDonnell powerfully upheld the sentiments of the *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin*:

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

No Roman Catholic can disavow the facts stated there – We are depressed, even in our business as merchants – We stand in an inferior situation to men much below us in trade and opulence – We cannot be governors of the bank, members of the ballast office committee, trustees of the royal exchange ... We feel that we might be as safely entrusted in public concerns as any other description of our fellow subjects. If the publication is improper, let the persons who made it be responsible, but let not government punish the innocent. It would be very hard if the body of the Roman Catholics, faithful and loyal subjects would suffer for the indiscretion of a few.³⁸

The official notes of the interview taken by Hobart's Secretary help to clarify the record in the Catholic Committee Minute Book, revealing greater detail about this extraordinary discussion. Although both records agree on many points, the government's rendition suggests that McDonnell was primarily responsible for speaking in support of Catholic rights while the other members of the deputation may have been more concerned with appeasing Hobart in order to appear co-operative and to acquire future government assistance. All parties agreed that the publication was in no way connected to the Catholic Committee and may have been an untimely publication, but certain members of the delegation were far more concerned with maintaining good relations with the Irish administration than with defending the Catholic cause. Even within this four-man delegation, therefore, significant differences of opinion were discernable.

Along with the rest of Ireland, the Catholic Committee members found themselves polarised, obliged either to condemn or to support the controversial declaration. Radical Protestant and Catholic organisations, such as the Catholic Society or Society of United Irishmen, could defend the publication, while traditional conservatives, such as the Irish government, Protestant gentry and clergy, were prompt to offer condemnation. The loyal and constitutional, but dissatisfied and aggrieved

³⁸ Ibid.

Catholic Committee, however, became deeply fractured by the debates surrounding the publication. The ongoing problem of dissension, which had plagued the Catholic Committee earlier in the year, was, therefore, greatly aggravated by the publication of the Catholic Society's declaration and these divisions took centre stage within one month of its unexpected arrival.

The initial two meetings of the complete General Committee which followed the publication of the declaration were relatively ordinary. The first, on 30 November, ordered a report on the sub-committee's activities and the second, on 3 December, provided that update. This report contained information on John Keogh's visit to London to solicit the aid of Richard Burke as agent; the November interview held with Hobart; as well as general details of the Catholic Society's declaration and the Committee's intended method for handling the crisis, 'to keep constantly in view the objects for which we were appointed'.³⁹ Having thereby expressed its intent to continue its endeavour with optimism before the impending opening of parliament in January, the Catholic Committee leaders urged its members that, since 'it does not become us to decide that government is unpropitious to our wishes before it has declared against us ... It is incumbent on us not to interrupt [negotiations] in their progress'.⁴⁰ The meeting then concluded by resolving to meet every Saturday fortnightly throughout the next session of parliament and until 1 May 1792.

Despite this official show of optimism and unity on 3 December, however, the Committee was soon confronted by dissent within its own ranks. As with the events of March 1791, Viscount Lord Kenmare objected to the plan suggested by the sub-committee and undertook to pursue his own course of action. Acting alongside local

³⁹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 139.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Bishop Teahan of Kerry, Kenmare arranged to produce an address of loyalty to the royal government from the Catholics of County Kerry.

As a major landholder in County Kerry, Kenmare was easily able to raise support and acquire signatures for this address, which was published on 15 December and which declared opposition to seditious writings that might sow 'the seeds of discontent and impatience among the lower class of their persuasion'.⁴¹ In the *Kenmare Manuscripts*, the editor, Edward MacLysaght, has observed that Catholic landowners, such as Lord Kenmare, were 'seldom free from apprehension that something might happen to endanger their property or their freedom – a new bogus plot, fresh anti-popery legislation'.⁴² With a 120,000 acre estate in County Kerry, valued between £3,000 and £12,000, the fourth Lord Kenmare had far more to lose than many other Catholic Committee members and greater reason to reassure the government of his unfettered and absolute loyalty.

This urgent expression of servile obedience was also introduced into the debates held at the next meeting of the General Committee on 17 December. Speaking on behalf of the more conservative members, William Bellew attempted to introduce three resolutions intended to soothe the nerves of agitated Protestants and government officials. The most controversial of these was the second resolution which declared:

We do not presume to point out the Measure or Extent to which such Repeal [of Penal legislation] should be carried, but leave the same to the Wisdom and Discretion of the Legislature, ... that it will be as extensive as the Circumstances of the Times and the general Welfare of the Empire shall, ... render prudent and expedient.⁴³

⁴¹ Daire Keogh, *The French Disease, The Catholic Church and Irish Radicalism 1790-1800* (Dublin: Four Courts Press Ltd., 1993), p. 52.

⁴² Edward MacLysaght (ed.), *The Kenmare Manuscripts* (Dublin: Irish University Press for the Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1942), p. xii.

⁴³ *General Committee of Roman Catholics, Dublin, 14th January, 1792 - The Following Account of our Proceedings was Reported, Approved of, and Ordered to be Printed* (Dublin, 1792), p. 2.

Before he was able to propose the third resolution, however, Bellew was interrupted by demands for corrective amendments, which effectively negated his resolution and instead proclaimed that the Committee would 'refer to the petition intended to be presented to Parliament in the last session as a criterion of our sentiments'.⁴⁴ When a vote was held to decide whether to accept these new amendments in place of Bellew's resolution, the resulting tally showed them the overwhelming preference with 90 'aye' votes, which were announced by Randall McDonnell, to a mere 17 'noes' in support of Bellew. At this point in the meeting, therefore, the widening split within the Catholic Committee became both official and public.

The Catholic Committee Minute Book contained no mention of William Bellew's failed resolutions. Instead, it listed only the amended statements voted in by majority decision. There was, however, the additional inclusion of a resolution reasserting 'that the Committee consists of every Roman Catholic nobleman and gentleman of landed property'.⁴⁵ The subversive significance of this seemingly rhetorical observation can be better understood through the more detailed description of the events of 17 December, which were ordered to be published on 24 December and finally appeared three weeks later on 14 January 1792. In this small publication, entitled, *The Following Account of our Proceedings was Reported, Approved of and Ordered to be Printed on 14th January, 1792*, the Catholic Committee informed its nationwide supporters of the extraordinary events in December and of the Committee's catastrophic split.

The update opened by bluntly insisting that the Catholic Committee would not betray its constituents and bow to the wishes of a minority of landed gentlemen, known for their policies of opposition, delay, conciliation to Protestant interest, and 'Tardiness

⁴⁴ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 141.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

of Attention to the pressing Wants of the Roman Catholics'.⁴⁶ Lord Kenmare in particular was singled out and labelled, 'much less the Friend than the Opponent of the Catholics'.⁴⁷ These slanders were then supported with detailed accounts of the behind-the-scenes wrangling within the Committee during the month of December.

The exposé described how the declaration of the Catholic Society had helped to provide these dissenting individuals with 'a Pretext for insinuating that the Tranquillity of the Country was endangered'.⁴⁸ This, in turn, drove them to insist upon the introduction of professions, similar to the resolutions of William Bellew, which swore Catholic loyalty to the government. When this plan had been initially proposed, however, prior to the General Committee meeting of 17 December:

Some Gentlemen of our Sub-Committee ... requested the Promoter of them to postpone Discussion, ... the Objections to which said Resolutions were liable, were anticipated, and the Amendments, which it was intended to propose, in case he persisted, were shown to him.⁴⁹

The entire proceedings of 17 December, therefore, had been discussed and anticipated among the members of the Catholic sub-committee in advance. The dissenting conservative party, which sought to make resolutions of loyalty, had been aptly advised against the measure and warned about the resulting amendments which would be introduced in the case of such an event. When Bellew disregarded these cautionary warnings and proposed his controversial resolutions, he and his supporters were well aware of the disagreement and tension existing within the sub-committee.

The informative national update of 14 January 1792, further clarified the sub-committee's complex reasoning for objecting to Bellew's resolution. It was believed

⁴⁶ *General Committee of Roman Catholics, Dublin, 14th January, 1792 - The Following Account of our Proceedings was Reported, Approved of, and Ordered to be Printed* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

that Bellew, Kenmare and their party of dissenting committee members were, once again, intent on obstructing the Catholic Committee's productive negotiations, which were then proceeding at Westminster between Keogh, Burke, and the British Ministers:

It appeared to us, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that the real object of those, who called upon us to address the crown was not, that we should make a profession of loyalty, but to make use of that profession as a means of persuading his majesty and the public that we did not feel a deep sense of our degraded situation and that it was a matter of perfect indifference to us whether we were relieved or not. This we saw and, therefore, refused to agree to the address, which was in fact intended to counteract that useful negotiation which ... we had set on foot.⁵⁰

In particular, Bellew's second resolution, which contained the assurance that Catholics 'do not presume to point out the measure and extent to which such repeal could be carried',⁵¹ was shown to be especially insidious. This specific phrase angered the sub-committee and conflicted with the discussions at Westminster because 'this negotiation did enter into *the measure and extent to which such repeal could be carried*, these expressions were, therefore, intended to disavow our negotiation all together and to cut it up by the roots'.⁵²

The Catholic Committee was not opposed to the concept of a reasonable profession of loyalty to the government. Instead, it was concerned with the underhanded methods that the dissenting members employed to undermine ongoing activity in London and to usurp authority in Dublin. By returning to their traditional practice of obsequious ingratiation, the conservative party within the Committee ran the risk of setting the Catholic cause back and destroying the advances made since 1790. Furthermore, by challenging the other members of the sub-committee, the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

dissenting conservative party invited a power-struggle to reclaim its lost leadership over the Irish Catholics, which had been steadily diminishing throughout 1791.

The more moderate and less conciliatory members of the sub-committee included Edward Byrne, Randall McDonnell, Richard McCormick, Thomas Braughall and Theobald McKenna. These individuals were characterised by their professional and merchant-class origins, which contrasted greatly with the dissenters, who primarily included the landowning gentry and their extended relations. These merchant-class members comprised a majority, however, and they successfully retained control over the Catholic Committee in the face of the conservative challenge. Having been publicly embarrassed and their plan for control of the Committee thwarted, the dissenting gentry party withdrew and undertook to pursue a separate course of action.

The most infamous and detrimental act undertaken by these seceding Catholic conservatives, who ultimately claimed the Earl of Kenmare as their leader, was the production of an address of loyalty purporting to convey the true sentiments of Ireland's Catholic populace. Unable to pass the resolutions of their choice at the meeting of the General Committee, Kenmare, Bellew and their gentry party produced this address and presented it to the Lord Lieutenant on 27 December. Westmorland duly forwarded a copy to London the following day, explaining to Henry Dundas:

The Roman Catholic gentlemen of respectability and property having perceived the impressions to their prejudice which were likely to be made by the propagation of some late mischievous publications, deemed it expedient to remove such impressions by an address.⁵³

Evidence contained in a letter from Archbishop Troy to Chief Secretary Hobart dated 29 November 1791, further indicated that these Catholic gentlemen had been

⁵³ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/36/1 [Westmorland to Dundas, 28 December 1791].

intending to make an official pronouncement of loyalty since the end of November, shortly after the Committee's interview with Hobart at which Randall McDonnell had strongly objected to refuting the Catholic Society's declaration. Troy had written in November, 'I have reason to flatter myself that the most respectable amongst the Irish Roman Catholics from rank and property will shortly come forward with a declaration satisfactory to his majesty's government in this kingdom'.⁵⁴ Two weeks after this letter had been written, Lord Kenmare managed to produce the loyal address from County Kerry, where he possessed great influence. The overriding objections of the majority of the sub-committee, however, successfully prevented any similar pronouncement by the Catholic Committee. Following the separation which occurred as a result of the explosive meeting on 17 December, the Catholic gentlemen were able to pursue their objectives and draft their own loyal address.

This address of loyalty and attachment to the constitution opened by almost immediately contradicting the Catholic Committee, completely disavowing the *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin*, and 'disclaiming every word or act which can directly tend to alarm the minds of our brethren or disturb the tranquillity of this country'.⁵⁵ It went on to express extreme appreciation for all past favours bestowed by the crown upon the Catholics of Ireland. Most significantly, however, the address included three resolves. The first expressed an intention to apply for relief from penal legislation, while the third reiterated the Catholic gentlemen's intention to 'studiously avoid all measures which can either directly or indirectly tend to disturb or impede [tranquillity and subjection to the laws]'.⁵⁶ The second resolve contained in this address was an exact, word-for-word repetition of William Bellew's defeated

⁵⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/34/33 [Troy to Hobart, 29 November 1791].

⁵⁵ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/36/3-4 [Lord Kenmare's *Address of Loyalty*].

⁵⁶ Ibid.

resolution, which he had proposed at the general meeting of 17 December. Although the majority of the Catholic Committee had prevented this controversial and potentially destructive statement from becoming official, when left to their own devices the Catholic gentry faced no opposition and had no objection to including it as a resolution in their own separate address of loyalty and obedience.

The Earl of Kenmare and his followers succeeded in attaching a total of 68 signatures to their address, including other Catholic gentlemen, such as Lord Fingall, Lord Gormanston, and three members of the Bellew family, certain Catholic clergymen, and even some of the more cautious merchant-class members. For example, evidence on the surviving copies of the address suggests that long-time activist, D. T. O'Brien, may have been inclined to endorse Lord Kenmare's loyal address. The most significant clergyman to sign the address was Archbishop Troy, who included the reasons for his decision in a letter to Francis Moylan, the Archbishop of Cork, on 23 December. Troy explained his strong belief that:

It is absolutely necessary to step forward in a decided manner at this critical period whenever loyalty is suspected and the most extravagant levelling doctrines are openly avowed by some infatuated people here ... We must be firm whilst it continues otherwise our clergy will become obnoxious and be reputed the authors of sedition.⁵⁷

Troy clearly feared the threats posed by radicalism and the accusation of supporting it. He later showed this aversion to the principles of the French Revolution and his more conservative preference for an ordered society, by claiming, 'true liberty holds a middle ground between that independence which admits no restraint and the condition of a slave who acknowledges the sole will of a despot as law'.⁵⁸ Despite supporting

⁵⁷ P. O'Donoghue, 'The Catholic Church and Ireland in an Age of Revolution and Rebellion, 1782-1803' (unpublished PhD thesis, UCD, 1975), p. 150.

⁵⁸ John Thomas Troy, *A Pastoral Instruction on the Duties of Christian Citizens, Addressed to the Roman Catholics of Dublin* (Dublin, 1793), p. 4.

the cause of Catholic rights, therefore, Troy would not risk his own reputation or betray his convictions and accept any imputed association with radicalism.

Lord Kenmare may have possessed additional, less obvious, motives for preparing his loyal address as well. Despite being called a 'considerate and enlightened landlord', ⁵⁹ who was like a father figure to his tenants, Lord Kenmare did express certain negative opinions about the Irish rural middle classes, who, he believed primarily possessed the traits of 'pride, drunkenness and sloth'. ⁶⁰ Kenmare claimed, 'every one of them thinks himself too great for any industry except taking farms. When they happen to get them they screw enormous rents from some beggarly dairyman and spend their whole time in the ale houses of the next village'. ⁶¹ He even insisted that these patterns were passed down so that, 'this sloth and beggary are transmitted from generation to generation'. ⁶² This aristocratic sense of superiority over the Irish Catholic middle-classes was also mentioned in a letter written to an Irish MP on 29 November 1791. This letter described how the men of landed property in the Catholic Committee saw their rivals 'as upstarts'. ⁶³ Finally, Edmund Burke provided a detailed description of the Irish Catholic gentry in a letter to his son, on 3 January 1792, in which he explained:

To my knowledge ... [the old Catholic gentlemen] perfectly despised their brethren and would have been glad at any time if anything ... could have been contrived to discriminate them from the rest of their description ... As a new race of Catholics have risen by their industry, their abilities and their good fortune, to considerable opulence and of course to an independent spirit, the old standard gentlemen were still less disposed to them (as rivals in consideration and importance) ... ⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Edward MacLysaght (ed.), *The Kenmare Manuscripts*, p. 141.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 125 [Thomas Knox to Lord Abercorn, 29 November 1791].

⁶⁴ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vol. vii (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 9.

Lord Kenmare and some of his followers, therefore, may have been encouraged to seize the reins of control from their upstart rivals in the Catholic Committee out of a sense of self-importance, which led them to believe that it was their justified right to determine policy and to choose the most appropriate course for Catholic activism.

The Catholic Committee and its allies did not respond to this blatant insult silently. The Catholic Committee challenged the gentry's honesty, raising questions about the methods used to gain as many signatures as possible for their address such as, 'using every pitiful manoeuvre – adding the names of sons by permission of mothers – a gentleman in Italy (insane) his name is added'.⁶⁵ An anonymous letter written by 'An Irish Helot' was also addressed to Lord Viscount Kenmare and originally appeared in the *National Evening Star*, before being published as a pamphlet called *A full Defence of the Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin, in Reply to an Anonymous Pamphlet by Vindiciae Catholicae* in December 1791. The author directly attacked Lord Kenmare's attempt at presuming 'to inform government that the Irish Catholics were perfectly satisfied with their situation and wanted no more'.⁶⁶ In addition, he argued, 'you are but a private individual ... however you may flatter yourself to the contrary ... you are invested with no public character or commission, whatever from them or the other Catholics of this Kingdom'.⁶⁷

In opposition, Lord Kenmare's supporters ultimately succeeded in procuring other addresses of loyalty from provincial Catholic groups, such as the Catholics of Kilkenny and the Catholics of County Mayo. These provincial declarations agreed in substance with the loyal address presented to the Irish government on 27 December and

⁶⁵ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2658 [John Keogh to Richard Burke, 17 May 1792].

⁶⁶ *Vindiciae Catholicae, A Full Defence of the Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin, in Reply to an Anonymous Pamphlet* (Dublin, 1791), p. 86.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

frequently contained the same three resolutions reproduced verbatim. Members of the Irish Catholic gentry, who agreed with Lord Kenmare, considered his conservative approach to be the most reliable path towards legislative relief. An associate of Lord Fingall expressed strong satisfaction with Kenmare's methods in a letter dated 24 December 1791:

I know it hath made me happy to find my relatives and friends of that persuasion adopt a temperate course, not only on account of its tendency to peace, but also as being the most likely to effect either the desired repeal or at least a liberal modification of laws long complained of by the bulk of our people.⁶⁸

The Catholic Committee did not share this optimism or faith in out-dated and servile professions of affection for the royal government. Despite possessing a mutual desire for relief from the penal restrictions, the majority of the Catholic Committee members felt outraged by the actions of the Irish Catholic gentry party, which had split Catholic opinion and undercut the Committee's carefully considered tactic. Furthermore, they were greatly disappointed by certain members of the Catholic clergy who were seen to be traitors, 'abetting, with Acrimony, Opinions in which the Mass of the People differ from them' and acting 'in Opposition to our Interests'.⁶⁹

The Catholic Committee's worst fears and suspicions of a corrupt influence at work were aroused by these events. The atmosphere of optimism, which had characterised the Irish Catholic movement throughout much of 1791, therefore, dissipated significantly during the month of December and by the close of the year Catholic activists found themselves completely at odds with one another. Into this powder keg of division, mistrust and tumult, and with mere weeks before the annual

⁶⁸ National Library of Ireland, Fingall MSS 8021 [Wilson to Lord Fingall, 24 December 1791].

⁶⁹ *General Committee of Roman Catholics, Dublin, 14th January, 1792 - The Following Account of our Proceedings was Reported, Approved of, and Ordered to be Printed* (Dublin, 1792), p. 2.

opening of the Irish parliament, Richard Burke and John Keogh arrived back in Dublin.

II

John Keogh and Richard Burke at Westminster

John Keogh had departed for London in the latter half of September 1791 to secure an agent to advance the Irish Catholic cause before the government ministers in Britain. In a retrospective account of events, which Keogh produced several years later, he boldly claimed that the majority of the Catholic Committee considered the errand to be futile and doomed to failure:

I was of a different opinion and pressed that one of the Committee should be deputed to London ... They were persuaded that the minister would not receive their deputy and at all events would grant no relaxation of our grievances ... The meeting was actually breaking up ... when I, and I alone, offered to go to London.⁷⁰

More contemporary accounts from late 1791 and January 1792, including the Catholic Committee Minute Book and the Committee's printed circulars, provide slightly different details. The minute book stated that 'Mr. Keogh's ill state of health requiring him to pass through London on his way to the continent your sub-committee embraced the opportunity of confiding to him the business of arranging and conducting this negotiation'.⁷¹ The claim that Keogh had been planning on passing through London for personal reasons prior to the decision to pursue any political negotiation is also supported by the publication, *General Committee of Roman Catholics, Dublin 14th January, 1792 - The Following Account of our Proceedings was Reported, Approved of, and Ordered to be Printed*, which stated: 'It then became necessary to appoint an

⁷⁰ Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee*, i, p. x [Appendix No. V, 'Mr. Keogh's Account of the Delegation of 1793'].

⁷¹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 137.

Agent in London ... and Mr. Keogh, who was going there, offered, with that Zeal which distinguishes him, to exert himself in our Behalf'.⁷² Evidence that John Keogh did indeed suffer from health problems, which drove him to seek relief on the continent, is also contained in Keogh's own surviving correspondence. On 30 November he wrote to Charles O'Connor, 'I did expect to have been in the South of France long since' and in this same letter Keogh described himself as 'an invalid'.⁷³ Keogh continued to complain of ill health long into 1792, explaining on 17 May that, 'the truth is my health declines, it is not one day in ten I can even attempt a letter'.⁷⁴ These numerous sources, therefore, strongly support the claim that Keogh had already intended to pass through London for health reasons and had merely undertaken additional Committee business as an afterthought.

As a result of the encouragement and support which he had expressed in 1790, the sub-committee decided again to approach Richard Burke to request his assistance in the role of agent for the Committee at Westminster. Richard Burke's personal and professional connections made him an excellent candidate for the appointment. Moreover, his family's reputation for condemning radicalism, and his own belief in legal and constitutional means for redressing grievances, helped to legitimise his actions as well as those of his patrons, the Catholic Committee. The circular update of 14 January explained to the Catholics of Ireland that in Richard Burke, 'local Information and Abilities, joined to an hereditary Regard for the Victims of Oppression, as well as the established Constitution in Church and State'.⁷⁵

⁷² *General Committee of Roman Catholics, Dublin, 14th January, 1792 - The Following Account of our Proceedings was Reported, Approved of, and Ordered to be Printed* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

⁷³ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir* (Dublin, 1891), p. 297.

⁷⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2658 [John Keogh to Richard Burke, 17 May 1792].

⁷⁵ *General Committee of Roman Catholics, Dublin, 14th January, 1792 - The Following Account of our Proceedings was Reported, Approved of, and Ordered to be Printed* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

Secure in his political mission and armed with an official letter of introduction from Edward Byrne on behalf of the Catholic Committee, which was dated 15 September 1791, Keogh embarked for London to meet Richard Burke. This letter accurately described Keogh as 'an active and most informed member' of the sub-committee, who had been appointed to update Burke and to provide him with 'a particular detail of our negotiations and of their present state'.⁷⁶ At the time of Keogh's arrival in London, however, Burke was out of the country engaged in an important political mission to Coblenz on behalf of the British government. John Keogh was, therefore, awaiting Burke's return for several days before the two men finally met. Surviving evidence indicates that Richard Burke returned to London and undertook his agency for the Catholic Committee between 26 September and 4 October, holding his first official meeting on behalf of the Committee with Home Secretary Dundas on 5 October 1791.

Although Thomas Hussey described Keogh as 'a vain, talkative man'⁷⁷ and Richard Burke was accused of timidity and of having 'a supercilious air ... often observed in well bred men of short stature and slight figure',⁷⁸ the two political activists found common ground between them upon which to build an effective working relationship. Surviving correspondence further suggests that John Keogh and Richard Burke quickly developed both a personal and a professional relationship based on mutual and reciprocal respect. Keogh described some of the arguments that he employed to convince the Burke family of the logic to their supporting the Catholic cause:

⁷⁶ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 397.

⁷⁷ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, p. xvii [Dundas to Richard Burke, 20 January 1792].

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xviii [Sir R. Bourke to Earl Fitzwilliam, 9 April 1852].

That if his father's powers and eloquence were called forth to reprobate the French for throwing their country, their monarch, church, laws, nobles, etc. into confusion – of consequence, subjects who suffered during a century, degraded beyond any other people on the whole globe ... were the very people to be protected by his abilities. Our relief would prove good subjects could be redressed without violence.⁷⁹

Keogh's accurate and persuasive observations, however, may not have been entirely necessary, since Richard Burke demonstrated his own support and enthusiasm for the Irish Catholic cause by acting promptly to meet with British ministers very shortly after his return to Britain.

Between 5 and 29 October, Richard Burke successfully held official interviews on the subject of Irish Catholic relief with Prime Minister Pitt, Secretary of State Grenville and Secretary of State Dundas. He showed these important officials the letter from Edward Byrne, which authorised him to speak on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, and he announced his intention to seek a legislative solution. His reception was generally positive, with Dundas expressing his own sympathy for the Catholic cause and Pitt pleasantly offering to hold future meetings. This brief conversation was recorded as a memorandum and provides evidence that Richard used the British government's earlier treatment of English Roman Catholics as a legal precedent and a demonstration of the government's liberal attitude:

That the proceedings of last year with regard to the Roman Catholics of England form a sufficient indication of the liberal principles entertained by those who direct the public affairs of this country and naturally brings into view the case of the Roman Catholics of Ireland.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 297 [John Keogh to Charles O'Connor, 30 November 1791].

⁸⁰ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 8/85-89['*Memm of 1st Conversation with Mr. Pitt Approved by him*'].

Additionally, Burke displayed his support for the Catholic cause and his own strong concern for his patrons in Ireland by reiterating to Pitt his hope 'that their situation is actually under consideration'.⁸¹

Secretary of State Grenville has also left a description and a record of his official conversation with Richard Burke on the subject of Irish Catholic relief in a letter written to Dundas in October 1791:

What I said to Mr. Burke was confined to general assurances of the favourable disposition of government to do all that should, on consideration, appear to be reasonable and practicable; but I thought it material not to go so far as that in order they might not think that their application was rejected and turn their attention elsewhere.⁸²

Grenville's letter demonstrates both the British government's complete acceptance of Richard Burke's agency as well as its concern that the Irish Catholics might drift towards associations with radicals and dissenters, if faced with a government rejection. This fear, which was widespread throughout Westminster and Dublin, helped to encourage British ministers to take seriously Burke's efforts on behalf of the Catholic Committee. These government ministers, therefore, were not merely driven by sympathy for the Irish Catholic cause, but were also motivated by the fear of the possible spread of Catholic radicalism. Grenville mentioned his own 'great anxiety' and corresponding desire to 'counteract the union between the Catholics and Dissenters, at which the latter are evidently aiming'.⁸³ Dundas similarly observed with concern the association between 'different descriptions of persons in Ireland', who seemed determined 'to act upon those levelling principles which have lately been

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, ii, 221 [29 October 1791].

⁸³ Ibid., p. 214 [Grenville to Westmorland, 20 October 1791].

disseminated'.⁸⁴ Even John Keogh described how 'the dread of encouraging French principles' helped him to rally support for the Catholic cause at Westminster. Finally, in a letter sent to Grenville, the dilemma was accurately presented and the question posed, 'Whether it is wise to give [the Irish Catholics] any part of their demands or the whole of them ... It is clear that the Dissenters will offer them everything provided they will assist in the reformation of elections and of Parliament'.⁸⁵ This atmosphere of fear amidst the rising popularity of French-inspired radicalism, therefore, had an enormous impact on the Catholic cause, the Irish Catholic Committee, and Richard Burke's reception on its behalf at Westminster.

British ministers were pleased with the Committee's choice for agent, as the Burke family had established itself as loyal and completely opposed to radicalism. Although officials were prompt to confer with Burke, they did have to take necessary, standard precautions. British officials apprised their subordinates in Dublin of Richard Burke's agency, leading Westmorland to request that Dundas 'enquire of Mr. Burke the names and descriptions of the Catholics that authorised him to talk to you that I may know whether they are any of the persons that have applied here'.⁸⁶ Also, Grenville enquired into the actual make-up of the Catholic Committee which Burke represented. After receiving an adequate reply he was able to report to Dundas with satisfaction, 'the committee to which Mr. Keogh belongs are persons of weight and responsibility'.⁸⁷ Within two months of Keogh's arrival in England and through the assistance of the Burke family, therefore, the Catholic Committee of Ireland successfully gained the

⁸⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/36/14-19 [Dundas to Westmorland, dated 26 December 1791 and sent 6 January 1792].

⁸⁵ *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, ii, 237 [Marquis of Buckingham to Grenville, 11 December 1791].

⁸⁶ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/20 [11 October 1791].

⁸⁷ *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, ii, 221 [29 October 1791].

confidence of the most important and influential officials in Britain. This gave the Committee good reason to anticipate positive intervention on its behalf.

Despite an encouraging start, however, negotiations in London were stalled throughout the month of November, as surviving records do not indicate the resumption of further official meetings until December 1791. Surviving records which may help to provide an explanation for this delay, include John Keogh's letter to Charles O'Connor, which was dated 30 November 1791, in which Keogh mentioned that Dundas 'was out of town and is again gone for a few days'.⁸⁸ Also, in the memorandum of Richard Burke's first conversation with Mr. Pitt, Burke was cited in mid-October as stating:

The absence of the minister to whose more immediate department the object in question belongs, renders it impossible for me at present to bring the business forward in any degree of detail, but that towards the end of November I trust I shall be able to speak with more precision.⁸⁹

These sources, therefore, indicate that Keogh and Burke were forced to await Dundas' return to Westminster before continuing their political negotiations.

In addition, Keogh himself may have contributed to the delay by presenting a small obstacle. Both private letters and the Catholic Committee Minute Book contain details of Keogh's attempt to gain the assistance of another suitable Committee member. Keogh apparently wished to depart for the continent, but believed it essential first to 'appoint a person to pursue the measures'⁹⁰ which he had taken in London and also to take 'possession of the valuable information which he had acquired and which it was impossible could be communicated by letter'.⁹¹ Accordingly, the Committee did select two reliable Catholic gentlemen of high rank to replace Keogh, namely Baron

⁸⁸ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 298.

⁸⁹ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 8/85-89['*Memm of 1st Conversation with Mr. Pitt Approved by him*'].

⁹⁰ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 297.

⁹¹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 137.

Hussey and Counsellor Rice. Edward Byrne wrote to Keogh on 19 November to explain that Keogh's letter dated 9 November had only just arrived in Dublin, but that in response to the request, 'I had the select committee summoned for a meeting at Allen's Court on the Wednesday following, some gentlemen attended though not many'.⁹² Byrne assured Keogh that he would speak with Hussey and 'urge all in my power his proceeding with every possible speed'.⁹³ Unfortunately, however, Hussey was engaged in a court proceeding, which occupied his time, while Rice seemed to Keogh unfit for the task as 'a man of good sense in a certain way, but in my opinion, ill-suited for this business, so that all chance of relief would have been at an end if left to his address'.⁹⁴ With no reliable assistance coming from Ireland, therefore, Keogh decided to remain at Westminster to oversee the negotiation himself.

Keogh's irreplaceable contribution was emphasised by his new associate, Richard Burke, who urged him to stay in London. Keogh explained to O'Connor, 'the reason [of Mr. Burke] chiefly for detaining me is that that I may see the minister of the Irish department, Mr. Dundas ... he is pleased to think that good may arise from my stating to him personally our wrongs'.⁹⁵ Even Byrne acknowledged in his letter, 'how much the cause of the Roman Catholics of this country are indebted to you'.⁹⁶ These combined factors, therefore, led Keogh to continue the work that he had begun in England and greatly enhanced his significance and contribution to the Irish Catholic movement.

Before his journey to London, John Keogh had not distinguished himself within the Catholic Committee. Although he had been an active member for many years, he

⁹² Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers [Edward Byrne to John Keogh, 19 November 1791].

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 297.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁹⁶ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers [Edward Byrne to John Keogh, 19 November 1791].

had never assumed a leadership role outside of his participation in the sub-committee. As with other Catholic Committee members, Keogh had traditionally deferred to the leadership of the Catholic gentry and in his November letter he expressed his disappointment at being 'deserted by our nobles and our men of hereditary property and education, [who] would add dignity to the application'.⁹⁷ In fact, Keogh was most probably referring to himself when he stated in the same letter that the Catholic Committee had been reduced to requiring the intervention of 'the humblest of Milesians' to promote its cause in London.⁹⁸ Described as a mere 'Dublin silk mercer' in Denis Gwynn's brief biography,⁹⁹ John Keogh was neither a learned academic, such as Theobald McKenna, nor was he the wealthiest merchant in the Committee, which was probably Edward Byrne.¹⁰⁰ Keogh was a self-made member of the merchant class who, despite possessing an uncommon commitment to the cause of Catholic relief, was also partially a victim of particular circumstances, which propelled him into a position of importance without his prior anticipation.

Negotiations between the representatives of the Irish Catholic Committee in London and the British ministers resumed approximately two weeks into the month of December 1791. Throughout these negotiations, Richard Burke attempted to address very specific Catholic grievances and to gain assurances from the government that particular rights would be restored. Keogh's contribution to these discussions would have been essential to explain to Burke the true nature of Catholic suffering in Ireland so that he could effectively formulate a strategy and compile a list of demands.

⁹⁷ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 298.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Denis Gwynn, *John Keogh* (Dublin, 1930), p. x.

¹⁰⁰ Byrne owned a County Down estate estimated at £60,000 in the early 19th century (D. Dickson, 'Catholics and Trade in 18th Century Ireland – An Old Debate Revisited' in *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (ed.) T. P. Power and K. Whelan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), pp. 85 – 100). Also, Richard Burke claimed in 1791 that 'Keogh himself has an estate of £2,000 a year in Galway' (The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/33/276 [Richard Burke to Dundas, undated December 1791]).

Moreover, as contained in John Keogh's retrospective account, in accord with Burke's wish, Keogh did eventually hold a meeting with Dundas at which he 'had the very good fortune and happiness to convince that minister that the interest of his majesty required that the condition of his Catholic subjects in Ireland should be ameliorated'.¹⁰¹

An additional contributor to these December discussions was Chief Secretary Hobart, who had been intentionally summoned to Westminster. Hobart met with Pitt and Dundas on 12 December, prior to holding a meeting with Burke on the fifteenth. Richard Burke wrote to his father that day to report that although his meeting had gone well and both parties agreed to the necessity of conciliating the Irish Catholics, he and Hobart differed with regard to one important point, 'we should have immediately concluded [the negotiation] if I would have given up the right of Franchise that, however, I shall yet carry it'.¹⁰²

The restoration of the elective franchise to the Catholics of Ireland had become the cornerstone of Burke's entire plan. He wrote to Henry Dundas in the midst of their negotiation to explain, 'the Right of Suffrage is the almost only acquisition ... which can be felt as immediate and personal benefit to any Roman Catholic'.¹⁰³ Even Archbishop Troy had apprised Hobart of this fact on 29 November, prior to his departure to participate in the Catholic relief negotiations at Westminster:

The Irish Roman Catholics feel many inconveniences from the octennial general elections ... On these occasions many of the peasantry are dispossessed of their lands in order to make Protestant freeholders and it is the general opinion that many other Catholics vote at such elections under the disguise of Protestants. For these reasons the most loyal, conscientious Catholics wish the right of suffrage at country elections to be communicated to respectable freeholders of their persuasion.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Thomas Wyse, *Historical Sketch of the Catholic Committee*, i, p. xi [Appendix No. V, 'Mr. Keogh's Account of the Delegation of 1793'].

¹⁰² A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 463 [Richard to Edmund Burke, 15 December 1791].

¹⁰³ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/33/268 [Richard Burke to Dundas].

¹⁰⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/34/33 [Troy to Hobart, 29 November 1791].

The granting of the right of franchise, therefore, became the paramount aim to Burke in providing effective relief and guaranteeing Irish Catholic loyalty to the government.

Richard Burke provided a precise summary of this proposal in a letter to Dundas, which was posted on 16 December. He stated that his intention was 'that every Roman Catholic Freeholder of 40 shillings who also bona fide rents and cultivates land to the value and rent of £20 a year, or possesses freehold of inheritance to that amount, should vote at county elections'.¹⁰⁵ Although Burke's proposed qualification of 40 shillings was identical to the rate of freehold applied to Protestant voters in Ireland, he wanted the qualification to be buttressed with the additional requirement of also renting land to the value of £20 a year, which greatly limited the potential number of enfranchised Irish Catholics. Furthermore, correspondence between Edmund and Richard Burke confirms that his father had been partly responsible for persuading Richard to lower his original proposal from a substantial £5 freehold requirement to the more standard 40 shillings: 'Five pound freehold is more than double the Protestant qualification ... that you may not go too far in raising the qualification as it may reduce the importance to be acquired by the franchise in proportion; in a manner indeed to nothing'.¹⁰⁶ In addition to the limited nature of the rental qualification, Richard Burke's proposal referred to voting only in county elections and provided no relief for Catholics wishing to vote in corporate towns. For these reasons, the plan for enfranchising the Irish Catholics, which was proposed to the government in 1791 was moderate and a potentially weak compromise by some standards. Edmund Burke recognised that Richard's suggestion was comparatively

¹⁰⁵ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 469.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 464 [16 December 1791].

conservative in nature, applying none of the reforming trends which were growing in popularity and, consequently, might succeed in appeasing government officials:

Your plan is the very reverse of that which the Dissenters hold out to the Catholics. Theirs goes to alter the representation, whilst it lets the Catholics into a share in the new acquisition. This of yours lets them into the House without altering the structure materially.¹⁰⁷

In addition to the franchise, three other rights were fixed upon as necessary to provide Irish Catholics with adequate relief from their present suffering. These items included admission to the bar; service on grand and petty juries in all cases; and permission to hold lower offices of appointment, including sheriffs, magistrates, coroners, and justices of the peace. All of these disabilities had been collectively preventing Irish Catholics from participating in Irish law enforcement and the judicial process. Not only were Irish Catholics unable to elect their own representatives to parliament and thereby to influence any new legislation, they were equally unable to control whether they were arrested, how they were defended in court, and what type of sentence was delivered. Under the penal system, the Catholics of Ireland were almost completely at the mercy of Protestant magistrates, attorneys, justices and juries. A Catholic Committee publication, which was released in late 1792, explained that in addition to their exclusion from grand juries, 'Catholics may not serve on any [petty] jury in trials by information or indictment grounded on any of the penal statutes'.¹⁰⁸ Also, in the Solicitor General's report delivered to British ministers in January 1792 it was stated, 'in any criminal proceeding or civil suits the prosecutor or plaintiff may

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 464 [16 December 1791].

¹⁰⁸ *A Vindication of the Conduct and Principles of the Catholics of Ireland, from the Charges Made Against Them, by Certain Grand Juries, and Other Interested Bodies in that Country; with an appendix ... on Dec 3, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 37.

challenge a papist juror, which challenge the judge is directed to follow'.¹⁰⁹ The implications associated with relying solely on the justice and mercy of Protestant jurors and magistrates was vividly described in the Catholic Committee's pamphlet:

The Catholics of Ireland may be allowed to apprehend a possibility of danger to [life or property], from the unqualified and unrestrained exertion of judicial authority by men who, in the very outset, display a spirit of such determined animosity.¹¹⁰

Richard Burke pursued his aims during the December negotiations with vigour. He provided Dundas with a thorough and extensive memorial outlining the historical conditions of Catholics in Ireland and he continued to press for further personal interviews. In his capacity as agent, Burke did everything in his power to convince British officials of the necessity and justice behind relieving Irish Catholic suffering through the restoration of the elective franchise. He explained that, although he was bound to support the Catholic Committee as agent, 'I also feel a deep and hereditary interest in their emancipation'.¹¹¹ Burke consistently based his arguments not on abstract claims, but on the overall practical benefit to Ireland, believing that the cause of the Catholics was just and that it completely coincided with the interests of government and the preservation of peace. Burke explained these views to Dundas:

¹⁰⁹ Scottish Record Office, *Melville Papers* MS.GD 51/1 [17 January 1792, 'Attorney & Solicitor General's Report'].

¹¹⁰ *A Vindication of the Conduct and Principles of the Catholics of Ireland, from the Charges Made Against Them, by Certain Grand Juries, and Other Interested Bodies in that Country; with an appendix ... on Dec 3, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 38.

¹¹¹ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 468 [Richard Burke to Dundas, 16 December 1791].

The principle to be adopted and practically asserted is that the Roman Catholic, the great mass and original stock of the Irish nation, is an integral part of the state and that the old exclusive system is to be abandoned as oppressive and impolitic. That being established, it follows of course that everything which is really advantageous to that people must be good for the government and that nothing can be beneficial to them which endangers the public tranquillity.¹¹²

Despite his enthusiasm and effort, however, Richard Burke never received a clear, incontrovertible response from Dundas. He clearly felt encouraged by the British ministers, who had made themselves available for several meetings and for ongoing communications, but he was still forced to plead with them in later December, 'it were exceedingly to be wished that I could convey your determination to my clients in Ireland'.¹¹³ Instead of learning Dundas's decision, Burke was forced to accept the direction of a referral 'to the government of Ireland for any further communications you may wish to hold on this subject'.¹¹⁴ Dundas did attempt to ease any resentment or concern by assuring Burke of his personal esteem and confidence that their December negotiations would indeed lead to a positive resolution of the Irish Catholic situation.

At the same time that Dundas was ending his negotiation with the Catholic Committee and its London agent at Westminster, he was supplying fresh instructions to his subordinates in Dublin. Chief Secretary Hobart returned to Ireland on 27 December armed with an official dispatch and a private letter for the Lord Lieutenant from Secretary Dundas, both of which provided directions for handling the Catholic situation. The official dispatch proclaimed that it was 'essentially necessary as well on grounds of justice as of sound policy to give a favourable ear to the fair claims of the Catholics of Ireland'.¹¹⁵ Dundas strongly recommended five changes to the penal code

¹¹² Ibid., p. 468.

¹¹³ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/33/251 [Richard Burke to Dundas, no date].

¹¹⁴ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 470 [Dundas to Richard Burke, 25 December 1791].

¹¹⁵ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/28 [26 December 1791].

in Ireland. These amendments included permitting Catholics to practise any profession or trade freely; to intermarry with Protestants; to bear arms; to educate children on Irish soil without restriction; and to serve on all grand and petty juries. Dundas could only suggest to the Lord Lieutenant to 'consider' a limited electoral franchise for Irish Catholics, but he did not dictate any specific or clear orders. Therefore, although he did privately express his own belief, that 'there cannot be a permanency in the frame of government and Constitution of Ireland unless the Protestants will lay aside their prejudices, forego their exclusive pre-eminence and gradually open their arms to the Roman Catholics', ¹¹⁶ officially the directions he gave to the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin Castle fell far short of Richard Burke's optimistic expectations. Dundas' own professed sympathy for the plight of Ireland's Catholics and his strong fear of any use of force or involvement with 'dangerous and licentious principles' ¹¹⁷ did not lead him to overrule the authority of the Irish government, to which he ultimately deferred and continued to support in the matter.

Only one day after Dundas had transmitted these dispatches, the Catholic aristocracy in Dublin, led by Lord Kenmare, delivered their loyal and dutiful address to Lord Lieutenant Westmorland. Richard Burke and John Keogh were kept apprised of events in Ireland through correspondents in the Catholic Committee. Burke immediately recognised the threat to his own negotiations which this schism could cause, describing it as 'by far the most rash, precipitate and ill judged measure that could be conceived in the present circumstances'. ¹¹⁸ He also grew deeply concerned about the potential involvement of the Irish government in the 'ill-timed activity', 'in his failure Lord Kenmare will discredit the good faith of government (on which

¹¹⁶ National Library of Ireland, Dundas MS 54 [26 December 1791, 'private'].

¹¹⁷ Scottish Record Office, *Melville Papers* MS.GD 51/1 [Dundas to Westmorland, 26 December 1791].

¹¹⁸ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/33/272 [Richard Burke to Dundas, no date].

everything depends) if they are supposed to have the least connection with him'.¹¹⁹ Burke even wrote to Dundas to exclaim, 'the Roman Catholics are extremely alarmed and irritated by the attempt to break and divide them'.¹²⁰ Richard Burke's supposition, therefore, implicated not only the Kenmarites in the disagreements, but ultimately held the Irish government responsible for attempting to undermine the entire Catholic movement by intentionally sowing discord and dividing the Catholics into two factions. This was completely innovative and new, as in all preceding communications the Catholic Committee had displayed a consistent and almost naïve faith in the good will of the Irish government. Far from the developing situation in Dublin, however, Richard Burke replaced that trust with suspicion and expressed strong concerns in the closing days of 1791; views which threatened to prejudice any future relationship he might have with Dublin Castle.

Towards the end of December, Richard Burke also came to the conclusion that a journey to Ireland would be necessary. With his duty completed in London and the new parliamentary session due to begin shortly in Dublin, he obtained letters of introduction to the Lord Lieutenant and prepared for departure. On 27 December he wrote to Dundas bidding him farewell and expressing his regret at not knowing the British minister's final decision: 'you will not tell me your determination and I do not venture to surmise. However, as I am naturally sanguine and hope what I wish, I go with tolerable spirits'.¹²¹ Burke successfully persuaded his comrade, the ailing John Keogh, to return to Ireland along with him, without the latter ever having reached the continent for respite: 'Mr. Keogh has consented, at my solicitation, to go with me, but he threatens if things do not turn out well and the return to Ireland does not kill him, he

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 471.

will kill me'.¹²² These two associates, therefore, decided that it was essential for them to be in Dublin at the opening of the parliamentary session in order to continue their discussions with government officials and to ensure the successful passage of the desired relief legislation, which they had been working towards during the preceding months. They left England filled with optimism and confident that their negotiations with British officials would bear fruit, despite the possibility of involvement by Irish officials in the Kenmare scandal. The situation into which they would soon arrive, however, immediately forced them to question these optimistic assumptions.

III

Richard Burke and the Catholic Committee in Dublin

Richard Burke and John Keogh travelled through Holyhead and finally arrived in Dublin on 3 January 1792. Upon reaching Dublin, Burke was prompt to make contact with the Irish government and to arrange a series of meetings, primarily with Chief Secretary Hobart, to discuss the situation of the Irish Catholics. As Hobart had also recently returned to Ireland from Westminster several days earlier, Richard Burke expressed his interest in learning the government's intended course of action. Additionally, he decided to speak out against the government's suspected participation in the activities of Lord Kenmare and his supporters. In a remarkably bold letter, Richard Burke wrote to Hobart on 7 January to implore him, on behalf of the government, to desist from sowing further discord:

¹²² Ibid.

The measure of soliciting these addresses was in its origin and apparent consequences of little moment; but if it is persevered in that trifling measure will lay the foundation in this kingdom of the most complicated and incurable civil war that ever embroiled any nation ... Beware how you sow discord, for the soil is good and the harvest will be plentiful.¹²³

In this confrontational piece of correspondence, Burke essentially accused the Irish government of intentionally seeking to divide the Irish Catholics by forming factions within their ranks and to have worked to procure numerous addresses of loyalty. He asserted an undeniable fact frankly to the Chief Secretary, that 'things are at present in a sort of hostile state between government and the Committee'.¹²⁴

Evidence suggests that Burke had already decided upon this version of events before arriving in Ireland. Writing to his parents from Wales, he described the 'one rash step of the Castle in endeavouring to excite a disavowing party of country gentlemen against the silent neutrality of the Committee'.¹²⁵ Burke recognised that as Hobart had been absent, he could not have been personally involved in these machinations. Despite this fact, however, Richard Burke did not restrain either his anger or his frustration when communicating with Hobart during the month of January. After several failed attempts at learning the government's official decision with regard to the Irish Catholics, Richard Burke petulantly complained to Hobart on 14 January, 'I sincerely lament that your answer to the Roman Catholics of Ireland should be vague, inexplicit and unsatisfactory. If you have not already ascertained the opinions of the friends of administration ... it is not the fault of the Roman Catholics of Ireland'.¹²⁶ Richard Burke's strong suspicions and biases against the Irish government, therefore, greatly affected all of his interactions with it.

¹²³ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 14 [Dundas to Richard Burke, 20 January 1792].

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6 [1 January 1792].

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14 [14 January 1792].

Edmund Burke shared his son's poor opinion of the Irish government and may have helped to reinforce Richard's prejudice. Edmund believed it likely that Dublin Castle had indeed pursued a 'scheme ... to divide the Catholics' intending 'to use them to oppose to other more dangerous factions'.¹²⁷ Furthermore, one week later on 8 January, Edmund Burke wrote to Richard exposing an act of even greater malice by asserting that the Irish government was not only weakening the Irish Catholic movement through division, it was knowingly working to hinder any relaxation of the penal code. Edmund Burke stated that the loyal address delivered by Kenmare would logically discredit the other non-signing committee members and imply disloyalty. It would, therefore, provide the Irish government with a justification for withholding concessions, 'it insinuates that there may be some reasons of state, which, without specifying or hinting at it, they presume may exist for denying the requests which shall be made to parliament'.¹²⁸ The Burkes, therefore, mutually concluded that the Irish government had intentionally divided and opposed the Catholic Committee and had obstructed its efforts. Believing that the government had no wish to grant legislative relief, the Burkes decided that Kenmare's address, 'to be sure, was theirs ... by this address they plainly wish to fight off the Catholics and to get as little for them as possible they can'.¹²⁹

Richard Burke communicated these unprecedented views to Henry Dundas in England. The agent for the Catholic Committee transmitted at least two extremely long and detailed letters in which he repeatedly complained about the Irish government's actions, listing a large number of their most amoral transgressions. These crimes ranged from attempting to ally with opposition members in parliament 'to lend them assistance to discontent the people', to travelling to poor and remote parishes 'to call

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11 [Edmund Burke to Richard Burke, 3 January 1792].

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

upon the inhabitants of the miserable cabins of Ireland to discuss and agitate [the question]'. ¹³⁰ Richard Burke informed Dundas that the Irish government had obtained loyal addresses through 'every kind of industry and every kind of deception', ¹³¹ and intended to use these address to demonstrate 'that the Committee does not really represent the Catholic body, but that they are a parcel of low and seditious citizens'. ¹³² He also asserted that the government was trying to manufacture and control their own Catholic faction, the Kenmarites, while employing 'every effort ... to exasperate people's minds against those who really are the Catholic body in order to give importance to their own little party'. ¹³³ Finally, Burke openly accused the Irish government of harbouring deep anti-Catholic sentiments:

They have now found out that it is below the dignity of government to treat with the Catholics and after having condescended to carry on a low and laborious intrigue with a few of the individuals, they put on their airs of state; they are afraid to contaminate themselves by an intercourse with the general body. ¹³⁴

Home Secretary Dundas seemed to respond to Richard Burke's initial accusations with reserved scepticism. Rather than accept Burke's rendition of events in Dublin, Dundas instead chose to caution him against developing any 'acquiescence in, if not approbation of the propriety of the Catholics having recourse to sentiments and measures of anarchy either separately or jointly with the Dissenters'. ¹³⁵ This reply, therefore, suggested that Dundas found Richard Burke's claims of an underhanded Irish government opposed to Catholic relief unlikely, but that a Catholic alliance with violent radical societies was entirely plausible. Dundas attempted to counsel Burke and to

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 29 [13 January 1792].

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 24.

¹³² Ibid., p. 23.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 27.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

¹³⁵ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 33 [Dundas to Richard Burke, 20 January 1792].

point out to him the sensible limits of his adopted agency: 'it is the business of an advocate to do the utmost he can for the good of the cause in which he is engaged, but it is certainly no part either of his profession or his duty to engage with them in every measure not justified by law or propriety'.¹³⁶ Rather than join Richard Burke in condemning the Irish administration, Dundas expressed his suspicions of the Catholic Committee, ultimately suggesting to Richard the 'propriety of separating from them'¹³⁷ if they did indeed choose to employ illegal tactics at some point. Despite agreeing to Irish Catholic relief legislation and supporting the Catholic cause in principle, therefore, Dundas' overwhelming concern and fear over the spread of radicalism led him to dismiss Burke's warnings and to provide him with no assistance whatsoever.

This concern was similarly reflected in Dundas' letters to Westmorland at Dublin Castle. Although Dundas considered it essential to give the Irish Catholics a 'favourable ear',¹³⁸ he was more motivated by his fears than by his liberal ideas. Dundas had encouraged the December negotiation with Richard Burke and the Catholic Committee because 'I conceived it to be a symptom of no union being formed between the Catholics of Ireland and any description of leveller'.¹³⁹ He also went so far as to concede to Westmorland in late January that 'the preservation of the Protestant establishment in Ireland has been and must continue to be the object of our anxious wishes'.¹⁴⁰ Ultimately, the British minister even had to state to the Lord Lieutenant:

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

¹³⁸ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/28 [Dundas to Westmorland, 26 December 1791].

¹³⁹ Ibid., Letter 1/47 [29 January 1792].

¹⁴⁰ Scottish Record Office, *Melville Papers* MS.GD 51/1 [29 January 1792].

The principal security against dangerous and desperate measures will depend upon the Catholics being impressed with a conviction, first, that any attempts to carry their object by force or intimidation or to connect it with dangerous and licentious principles ... will excite every possible degree of opposition and resistance from the government.¹⁴¹

Although Richard Burke may have anticipated some sort of support from Dundas in his dealings with the Irish government at the start of 1792, actual events fell far short of his expectations. Dundas provided his subordinates in Dublin with instructions to appear unbiased, to avoid making declarations, and to prevent disaffection and the spread of radicalism through liberal measures and Catholic relief. He did not, however, intervene to act as mediator between the Irish government and popular political parties. In fact, in describing the December negotiations to Lord Westmorland, Dundas explained that the British ministers had never interfered. They had given Richard Burke only very limited encouragement in England, no reason to expect total success in Ireland, and never intentionally fostered in him any false hopes:

[Our] sentiments, however, led to nothing more than general expressions of good will to the Roman Catholics of Ireland, attended with an explicit declaration that the government of this country could enter into no further explanation on the subject without learning the sentiment of the Irish government ... When Mr. H[obart] arrived we, upon his suggestion, resolved to keep the same reserve.¹⁴²

At the same time that Richard Burke was complaining loudly about Dublin Castle, Irish officials were writing to describe the irresponsibility of his language and actions. Westmorland informed Dundas on 11 January that Burke had recently 'written a most impertinent letter demanding a categorical answer from government'.¹⁴³ Also, another Irish official at the Castle described an incident whereby Burke communicated the Committee's wishes to Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon, 'Mr. Burke is ... holding very

¹⁴¹ Ibid., [26 December 1791].

¹⁴² National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/47 [29 January 1792].

¹⁴³ Ibid., Letter 1/53 [11 January 1792].

wild language. He has been with the Chancellor and the Chancellor told me that the purpose of the conversation with him was that whatever was to be done was to be through the medium of the Catholic Committee or the body would not be contented'.¹⁴⁴ Burke told FitzGibbon at that same time that the Irish Catholics wanted a promise for 'all the concessions made in England together with the eligibility to provincial magistracy and to be sheriffs and justices-of-the-peace'.¹⁴⁵ Irish officials were completely unaccustomed and unprepared for the agent of a popular political organisation to address them with this type of directness and disrespectful candour.

In addition to criticising his bold approach, Burke was also accused by the Irish government of providing the Catholic Committee with inaccurate information. Irish ministers credited Richard Burke with falsely raising Catholic expectations by telling them that concessions were guaranteed, based on the December negotiation at Westminster: 'he states the encouraging conversation of English ministers as tantamount to their promise of supporting all the measures of the Catholics'.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, he was found to be engaging in indiscrete, public accusations of corruption, which greatly undermined the government's authority. Lord Westmorland repeatedly referred to 'Mr. Burke's suspicious language, situation and conduct'.¹⁴⁷ The Lord Lieutenant believed that Richard Burke was the person primarily responsible for aggravating relations between government, parliament and public:

¹⁴⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/36/40-41 [Edward Cooke to Scrope Bernard, 11 January 1792].

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 37 [Edward Cooke to Scrope Bernard, 21 January 1792].

¹⁴⁷ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/45 [Westmorland to Pitt, 18 January 1792].

Mr. Burke's stories are hourly gaining ground, the effect of them already has produced a determination in the opposition to resist all concession however trifling ... Protestants of all description are united in sentiment against the government and it is hard to say whether we are most unpopular in or out of Parliament.¹⁴⁸

Irish officials consistently denied Richard's claims, responding with alarm to accusations of a corrupt, anti-Catholic sentiment. Chief Secretary Hobart replied to Burke in a letter dated 8 January, 'I am a good deal surprised and indeed concerned to learn from you that you think the government and the Committee are in a sort of hostile state'.¹⁴⁹ Hobart recalled the meeting he had held with the Catholic Committee members in November 1791 and insisted that the Irish government's opinion of the Catholics had been and continued to be 'favourable'.¹⁵⁰ External factors outside the government's control, such as Burke's intemperate behaviour and Dr. McKenna's Catholic Society publication were blamed for turning the public against the Castle's own plan for passing Catholic relief legislation. Westmorland explained to Pitt, 'I had with much difficulty reconciled our friends to the good policy of following England in the Catholic concessions ... when this confounded pamphlet appears and has [really-?] brought the government into a state of misery and difficulty'.¹⁵¹

This evidence challenges Richard and Edmund Burke's claims and raises doubts as to the true opinions of the Irish government in January 1792. Although Irish officials did strive to determine which concessions would be acceptable to the Protestant Parliament and, as a result, chose to abandon certain measures, there is no clear proof that they had colluded in the formation of Kenmare's address of loyalty or the later supporting addresses in an attempt to hinder the objectives of the Catholic

¹⁴⁸ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 36 [Westmorland to Dundas, 22 January 1792].

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18 [Hobart to Richard Burke, 8 January 1792].

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/35 [1 January 1792].

movement. The only evidence supplied by Marshall and Woods, to support this version of events is a single sentence contained in a letter from Westmorland to Hobart on 27 December 1791, 'we have certainly effected the separation we wished'.¹⁵² Taken from a passage in a letter referring to the Kenmarite address, the complete paragraph stated:

The address from the Roman Catholics was presented this day. I am told almost every man worth 500/year in the kingdom has signed it. Similar addresses may be expected from different parts of the country. We have certainly effected the separation we wished.¹⁵³

Placed back into its original context, this sentence fails to indict the Irish government, which seems to exhibit an ignorance of the preparation of the loyal addresses. Additionally, although the editors are interpreting 'separation' to mean an internal separation of Catholic factions from one another, it is equally plausible that Westmorland was referring to the separation of Catholics and the Catholic Committee from radical societies, a union which all government officials feared in December 1791. For Irish officials who had previously recommended this measure, as Hobart had done when meeting with the Catholic Committee in November 1791, the presentation of addresses of loyalty would have been considered assurance of the Catholic Committee's good behaviour and a 'separation' from the dangerous radical societies steadily gaining ground in Dublin. Far from a smoking gun, therefore, Marshall and Woods' single piece of evidence of Castle corruption at the end of 1791, may be little more than a damp squib.

The Irish government may legitimately have been unable to discern which Catholic faction spoke and represented the true voice of Ireland's Catholics in early 1792. As the Catholic gentry had always been the Catholic Committee's primary

¹⁵² P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 6.

¹⁵³ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/30 [Westmorland to Hobart, 27 December 1791].

leaders and spokesmen, Dublin Castle would not have been incorrect in considering them the controlling party. In actual practice, however, Keogh, Byrne and the other Catholic merchants were prompt in ejecting the Kenmarites from the Committee and excluding them from ongoing political participation in their organisation.

The Catholic Committee Minute Book contains the unanimous resolution made on 14 January 1792 to the effect that Lord Kenmare had 'entirely forfeited [the Committee's] confidence by his late conduct in procuring by his own exertions and those of his emissaries, certain insidious and servile addresses, calculated to divide the Catholics of Ireland' and hence, he and other Catholic gentlemen should be 'struck off the list of the sub-committee appointed to make applications to the legislature'.¹⁵⁴ This decision was printed in several newspapers and made public. The Committee's strong language and decisive action clearly suggested that Lord Kenmare himself was the primary person responsible for the production of loyal addresses. This accusation was then described in greater detail in a pamphlet printed on 15 January in which the Committee sought to explain its opposition to the original loyal address and to list Kenmare's transgressions.

The publication explained that the supposedly loyal address was, in fact, 'fabricated for the purpose of throwing imputations of faction and turbulence on the Committee'.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, that it had been intended 'to convey an opinion that this committee was not composed of the men of property and respectable gentlemen ... but of low and factious persons not really ... speaking the voice of the Roman Catholics of this kingdom'.¹⁵⁶ Finally, the address had been written to convey 'a false impression'

¹⁵⁴ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 144.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

to the public about the true wishes of the Catholic community and their ambivalence about gaining relief from penal restrictions.

The authors of the loyal address were similarly criticised and accused of working 'to form divisions and disseminate discord among the Roman Catholics in order to obstruct their emancipation'.¹⁵⁷ They were additionally blamed for seeking 'to seduce the Roman Catholic clergy from the laity and to set them at variance'.¹⁵⁸ Although the publication was intentionally vague, failing to name the 'promoters' of the address other than Kenmare himself, there is no evidence or suggestion whatsoever that the Irish administration had played any role in the rift. The Irish government was, in fact, only mentioned in a single proposition for the Catholic Committee to present their own explanatory address containing 'the motives which have induced us to withhold our signatures from a certain paper',¹⁵⁹ a suggestion which was never followed.

A more detailed description of the Committee's opinion of the Irish government was contained in a separate publication, prepared in the form of a letter from Edward Byrne to the Catholics of Ireland and dated 14 January 1792. This letter corresponded with the Committee's growing determination to strengthen lines of communication between Dublin and the counties at the start of 1792. This tactical shift was intended to draw provincial Catholics into national politics and remedy a 'fatal omission' of which the Committee had been guilty 'in not making effectual provision for the regular and constant transmission of our proceedings and intentions to our constituents in every part of the kingdom'.¹⁶⁰ After informing the Catholics of Ireland that the Committee was seeking the restoration of the four rights specified by Richard Burke during the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁵⁹ *General Committee of Roman Catholics, January 15, 1792, Edward Byrne, Esq. in the Chair. The Following Resolutions Were Unanimously Agreed To, and Ordered to be Printed* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 311 [Lewis Lyons on behalf of the Catholic Committee to Denis O'Connor, 7 January 1792].

December negotiations, the franchise; the bar; serving on juries; and holding lower level offices, Edward Byrne's printed letter indicated how the Committee felt about Irish officials at the Castle. In stark opposition to the contents of Richard Burke's personal letters, this public document optimistically admitted that:

We are not yet authorised to inform you that we are to be supported in Parliament by the ministers of the crown; but from the certain knowledge we have obtained of the liberality and soundness of their general sentiments; from our conviction of the beneficence of our gracious sovereign, whom they represent, towards all his subjects ... we entertain little doubt but that we shall receive their warmest support.¹⁶¹

Far from considering that the Committee and the administration were in a state of hostility, therefore, this letter implied perfect harmony and kind sentiments.

Similarly, in a letter from the Catholic Committee to provincial Catholic, Denis O'Connor, on 7 January, the correspondent does not criticise the government, but emphasises the threat posed by rival Catholic factions 'assuming to speak or act in the name of the Catholics of Ireland', which would interfere with their 'showing government what the real sense of the great Roman Catholic body is'.¹⁶² This letter then mentions the Committee's misguided belief that 'administration on the other side of the water retracted their engagements of procuring for us [relief] ... on the ground of our pretended disunion'.¹⁶³ The committee member had been incorrect in assuming that British ministers had ever intended to push any specific measures on the Irish government. In addition, the correspondent had misjudged the effect of Kenmare's address, which influenced the Irish public far more than the British government. Having had no actual participation in any of the Westminster negotiations, however,

¹⁶¹ *At a Meeting of the General Committee of Roman Catholics, it was Resolved, That the Following Letter Should be Addressed to the Different Committees, and to the Principal Persons of our Persuasion Throughout the Kingdom on January 14, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

¹⁶² John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 311 [Lewis Lyons on behalf of the Catholic Committee to Denis O'Connor, 7 January 1792].

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

this Catholic Committee member could only have formed his opinions through contact with either John Keogh or Richard Burke, who was specifically cited in this letter as having informed the Committee 'that he had hopes that things would have a favourable termination'.¹⁶⁴ This private letter from a representative member of the Committee, therefore, does not express any of Richard Burke's claims of government corruption, but does support Westmorland's belief that Richard had been supplying inaccurate information and falsely raising Catholic expectations. Moreover, it suggests the author's preoccupation with Catholic factions, such as the Kenmarites, which were seen to constitute a greater obstacle to their cause than the Irish government.

Despite the powerfully held opinions expressed by Richard and Edmund Burke in their personal correspondence, in no surviving documents from January 1792 has any Catholic Committee member in Dublin clearly stated his concurrence. The Irish government was never considered to be responsible for the Kenmarite address, rather the Catholic Committee members consistently seemed to hold their fellow Irish Catholics solely responsible. Accordingly, the Catholic Committee avoided engaging in the very conflict which Richard successfully aggravated, the battle between Castle and Committee. Partly due to the Castle's own misunderstandings over which faction truly spoke on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland and partly as a result of Richard's apolitical tactics, however, the outspoken majority of the Catholic Committee was viewed with mistrust and suspicion by certain Castle officials on the eve of the opening of Parliament in January 1792.

In preparation for the opening of Parliament, the Irish administration laid the groundwork for some sort of Catholic relief legislation. In December, Home Secretary Dundas had recommended five areas for their consideration: the free exercise of

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

professional trades and manufacture; intermarriage between Catholics and Protestants; modes and places for educating Catholic children; the use of arms; and Catholics serving on grand and petty juries. The additional suggestion to consider a limited franchise was quickly negated by the Irish cabinet, which did not support this concession. Similarly, the right to bear arms was quickly struck off the list by Irish officials. These decisions were reported to Dundas in a letter from Westmorland, who had earlier admitted his own confusion, 'I must confess myself equally at a loss to understand the object or how far I am to obey the directions conveyed in your dispatches'.¹⁶⁵ Out of the four remaining primary grievances, Westmorland was also forced to withdraw that of conceding the right to sit on juries. Although he recognised that it:

might be proper and becoming to be granted, at the same time it was agreed to be a point of much difficulty and delicacy for as great sums of money for various county purposes are raised annually by grand juries and admitting Catholics would give them a power which affords much consequence to the Protestant gentry and is at present in the hands of them only.¹⁶⁶

After protracted discussions the cabinet decided upon an indirect approach, which might more easily appeal to the Protestant Irish Parliament. Chief Secretary Hobart reported that the Lord Lieutenant had found his ministers 'unanimously so decided against the subject [of Catholic relief] being mentioned in the speech that he felt obliged to follow their fervent advice and avoid the topic when opening Parliament'.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, the cabinet decided not to make the bill for a relaxation of the penal code an official government measure. Instead, it was proposed that some trustworthy Irish MP

¹⁶⁵ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/40 [Westmorland to Dundas, 11 January 1792].

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Letter 1/40.

¹⁶⁷ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Scrope Bernard, 19 January 1792].

should introduce the measure independently and Hobart would voice the Irish government's full support afterwards. Westmorland described this scheme to Dundas, 'it was then settled that Mr. Hercules Langrishe, as soon as the address had been disposed of, should give notice of his intention to move on some proper day a question relative to the Roman Catholics and that Major Hobart should coincide with his proposal'.¹⁶⁸ Westmorland also discussed with Dundas the importance of avoiding any declarations, which might hinder the Irish government and 'tie up its future conduct'.¹⁶⁹ With these careful arrangements in place, the Irish administration felt prepared for the opening of the Irish Parliament, which took place on 19 January 1792. According to their plan, following Lord Westmorland's speech, Sir Hercules Langrishe informed the Irish House of Commons that he intended to bring forward a Catholic relief bill at a later date. Hobart described the response he gave in the House:

I acquainted the house that he had communicated his ideas to me and that I should give him my cordial assistance, being satisfied that Sir Hercules Langrishe would propose nothing that could be prejudicial to the establishment in church and state.¹⁷⁰

Although the Irish government failed to communicate these complex plans to any members of the Catholic Committee, including Lord Kenmare, the Catholics were informed by Hobart that 'it is the present intention of government to suggest for the consideration of Parliament in the ensuing session, the expediency of a further relaxation of the popery laws'.¹⁷¹ Aware that the issue of Catholic relief would be introduced, therefore, the Catholic Committee made whatever preparations were

¹⁶⁸ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/46 [Westmorland to Dundas, 21 January 1792].

¹⁶⁹ Scottish Record Office, *Melville Papers* MS.GD 51/1 [Dundas to Westmorland, 29 January 1792].

¹⁷⁰ British Library, *Hardwicke Papers*, Add. MS. 35933, fol. 44r [Hobart to Scrope Bernard, 19 January 1792].

¹⁷¹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/36/48 & 100/36/46-47 [Hobart to Lord Kenmare and to Richard Burke in 2 separate letters, 13 January 1792].

possible. In addition to improved communication with the provinces, the General Committee resolved to hold weekly meetings every Saturday afternoon until the close of the parliamentary session. Also, in Edward Byrne's letter of 14 January, the Catholic Committee advised the Catholics of Ireland to begin immediate, local canvassing of MPs, Protestant gentlemen and the Anglican clergy 'in order to dissipate the vain imagination that it is possible our emancipation should endanger the present establishment ... In waiting on gentlemen, you will endeavour to convince them of the unmerited hardships of your situation'.¹⁷² The Catholic Committee also renewed relations with opposition MPs thought to be sympathetic to the Catholic cause. By 18 January, Westmorland was able to report, 'Grattan, Curran and Egan are the only people known to be with the Catholics'.¹⁷³ The most significant contribution that the Committee could make to the Catholic cause during the parliamentary session, however, was the presentation of a petition. This course of action was followed and a finished draft ultimately read aloud at a meeting of the General Committee at the King's Arms on Fownes Street on 21 January 1792. At this same meeting a sincere note of thanks was given to Richard Burke 'for the petition he drew on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland',¹⁷⁴ while six days earlier the Catholic Committee had decided to send members to wait on Richard and officially 'to request that he will reside in the kingdom until such time as the important cause committed to his agency shall have its final determination'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² *At a Meeting of the General Committee of Roman Catholics, it was Resolved, that the Following Letter Should be Addressed to the Different Committees, and to the Principal Persons of our Persuasion Throughout the Kingdom on January 14, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

¹⁷³ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/45 [Westmorland to Pitt, 18 January 1792].

¹⁷⁴ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 149.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 145 [15 January 1792].

Richard Burke became a primary leader for the Committee in the early months of 1792, and was entrusted with a great deal of responsibility during the upcoming parliamentary session. Burke himself was more than willing to accept the Catholic Committee's vote of confidence, immodestly describing the new arrangement as 'my little flag at the stern of the Catholic vessel'.¹⁷⁶ Despite the withdrawal of the franchise, Richard Burke considered himself to be especially useful in the role of counsellor and arbitrator. He wrote to his father that his most worthwhile contribution 'is to keep my friends in the line of rational exertion and rational extremes and to prevent them from running into wild extremes of democracy'.¹⁷⁷ Burke claimed, 'while I stay here there is always a point of connection by which the government may approximate to the Catholics'.¹⁷⁸

Having made all possible preparations, the Catholic Committee and the Catholics of Ireland saw Parliament open on 19 January with anxious optimism. The recent controversy over the production of loyal addresses had raised political awareness throughout the kingdom and, as a result, had helped to draw the attention of more Irish Catholics to national events than ever before. Richard Burke recognised this phenomenon: 'this struggle for addresses has called out the people of the persuasion from all parts of the county to an open support and acknowledgement of the Committee and has, therefore, given the people at large and the Committee very different ideas of their own importance from what they used to have'.¹⁷⁹ This development was further substantiated many years later in Dr. MacNeven's retrospective where he claimed:

¹⁷⁶ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 36 [Richard Burke to Dundas, 20 January 1792].

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke, 29 January 1792].

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke, 29 January 1792].

[The Kenmarite exertions] produced counter resolutions from the Catholics of Ireland of almost all the counties and principal towns in the kingdom approving of the conduct of the Committee ... In the course of the meetings where these counter resolutions were passed, the condition of the Catholics was the subject of universal discussion and thus the sense of their rights and indignation at their wrongs were exceedingly increased.¹⁸⁰

Because of these widespread changes, therefore, expectations of Catholic relief legislation ran high in 1792, with strong national interest directed towards Dublin between January and March.

IV

The Irish Parliamentary Session of 1792

After publicly announcing his intention to introduce a bill granting Catholic relief on the opening day of Parliament, 19 January 1792, Sir Hercules Langrishe took several weeks to prepare the Irish Parliament for the actual appearance of the legislation. On 23 January, Langrishe stated that in two days he would move for leave to bring in the bill. At that time he would also express 'his general notions on that subject and at the same time mention those points to which, in his opinion, the attention of the house ought principally to be directed'.¹⁸¹

Sir Hercules Langrishe was a respected, independent member of the Irish parliament, who was described as 'an honourable baronet high in the friendship and confidence of [Irish] ministers'.¹⁸² He was also a friend and correspondent of Edmund Burke, who had counselled him on the justice of Catholic relief in a famous letter,

¹⁸⁰ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 24.

¹⁸¹ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, vol. 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), p. 27.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, [MP Ponsonby, 18 February 1792].

which was later published in early 1792 and which commented on the anticipated benefit to the Catholic cause. On 25 January, when he finally moved for leave to introduce the Catholic legislation, Langrishe prefaced his request with a long and convincing speech. Chief Secretary Hobart described how Langrishe ‘opened the subject by a statement of the concessions which had been made to [the Catholics] in the last few years, their peaceable and dutiful demeanour, the temperate manner in which they brought forward their wishes’.¹⁸³ Sir Langrishe claimed to be proud to consider himself ‘almost the first member of the Irish parliament who ventured to state to you the imprudence and immorality of what were then the popery laws’.¹⁸⁴ He was equally ardent in defending the character of the majority of Ireland’s Catholics. Langrishe sought to reassure his Protestant audience in the Irish House of Commons by telling them:

I know the loyalty of the Roman Catholics of Ireland. I know they will not taste of the cup of sedition, whether it be brought vapid and muddy from the troubled waters of Bethesdas’s pool; or come heated and mantling from the intemperance of the ale-house.¹⁸⁵

With the completion of his defence of the Catholics and his justification for introducing the relief measure, Langrishe explained to the Irish parliament that he had indeed sought the opinion of the House and had solicited ‘a communication with as many members of the legislation as I could ... conduct on the subject’.¹⁸⁶ The Irish MP then provided a general overview of the particular points to be included in the legislation. These points substantially reflected the influence of the Irish administration, as they included the exact concerns earlier decided upon by the cabinet:

¹⁸³ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary’s Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Scrope Bernard, 25 January 1792].

¹⁸⁴ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), 28.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

improved freedom to intermarry; the right to educate Catholic children; and the right of Catholics to practise professions and trades. In Langrishe's final draft, the provision of professional freedom, however, extended only to 'the practice and profession of the law', ¹⁸⁷ while the only relief granted to tradesmen was a removal of the obstructions 'that limit the number of apprentices, which are so necessary to assist and promote trade'. ¹⁸⁸

With the solitary exception of permitting Irish Catholics to practise law and to act as barristers, attorneys, solicitors or clerks by repealing a host of legislative obstacles, none of Richard Burke's or the Catholic Committee's requests was reflected in Langrishe's bill. The Irish MP clearly had a completely different set of priorities to the Catholic Committee, who were never consulted during the bill's preparation. Langrishe showed particular pride and placed special emphasis on the provisions extending increased freedom of education, 'because I think a state of ignorance is a state of barbarity'. ¹⁸⁹ Despite Langrishe's benevolent intentions, therefore, the proposed bill fell far short of the Catholic Committee's expectations.

The bill had its first official reading on 4 February, its second on the 11th and its final reading in the Irish House of Commons on 24 February 1792. Following the Irish administration's plan, Hobart spoke infrequently but consistently in support of the measure, reassuring the House that it was the determination of the government not to consent to any measure 'which could shake the Protestant establishment in church and state'. ¹⁹⁰ With the government's acknowledged approbation, therefore, the actual legislation itself met with relatively little opposition and passed through the Commons within one month.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁹⁰ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789–93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Scrope Bernard, 25 January 1792].

On the day of the third and final reading, Langrishe was able to proclaim joyously, 'I consider this bill ... as a new covenant, a new charter of amity and intercourse amongst us'.¹⁹¹ At this same time, Langrishe took the opportunity to recognise the contribution and assistance provided by certain Catholic activists, 'were it not for the wise and timely interposition of the great and respectable body of the Roman Catholics ... we should never have been justified in our undertaking nor successful in our conclusion'.¹⁹² Unfortunately, however, the statement made several days earlier on 4 February suggests that, rather than the actual Catholic Committee, Langrishe had been expressing his thanks merely to Kenmare and his supporters, the only group to have declared publicly, 'that grateful for what had already been granted, they would with joy and humility receive whatever the wisdom and liberality of Parliament thought proper to bestow'.¹⁹³ In stark contrast, and in complete opposition to his 'new charter of amity', Langrishe represented the other Catholic activists very differently:

As to the obscure and contemptible persons whose names filled the columns of newspapers declaring a contrary sentiment, he had no regard to them, while his opinion was supported by the wise, the good and the respectable.¹⁹⁴

Despite repeated claims of sympathy for Catholic grievances, therefore, even Sir Hercules Langrishe showed tremendous misconceptions about the true voice and actual sentiments of the Catholic Committee, which most accurately represented the Catholics of Ireland. As they had been excluded from any political intercourse and treated with suspicion by both administration and parliament, the Catholic Committee was inevitably confused with more radical organisations and subjected to outspoken

¹⁹¹ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), 246 [24 February 1792].

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 63 [4 February 1792].

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

condemnation by ruling Protestants. As a result, their attempts at presenting legal petitions to the Irish Parliament over the course of the 1792 session met with far greater debate and controversy than the actual relief legislation itself!

Although Langrishe, the Irish government, and certain Irish MPs displayed respect for the loyal sentiments of the Kenmare Catholics, they denounced the misrepresented activities of the Catholic Committee. The Irish administration felt obligated to recognise and reward the actions of Kenmare and the Catholic gentry through relief legislation. Hobart described Langrishe's statements in the Irish Commons sympathetically: 'he took care to distinguish the sentiments of the Roman Catholics as expressed in the loyal addresses of the gentlemen of rank, property and liberal education of that communion from the sentiments expressed by a few hot-headed men ... with a design to subvert the Constitution'.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, another Irish MP, Mr. Cuffe, differentiated between the Catholics headed by 'a nobleman who is distinguished for his liberality and extended property' and were considered to be 'good citizens – loyal subjects' truly deserving of 'every kindness in the power of legislature to bestow' and another group of Catholics criticised for having 'established a court of delegates in the capital' and for having 'appointed an agent to carry on the business'.¹⁹⁶ Even as the bill was proceeding through the Irish Parliament, MPs expressed these strong invectives against the Catholic Committee despite accepting the propriety of Catholic relief legislation. Moreover, although the administration had endorsed and silently prepared the bill, like Langrishe they did not recognise or accept the Catholic Committee.

¹⁹⁵ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Scrope Bernard, 25 January 1792].

¹⁹⁶ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), 37 [25 January 1792].

In addition to the Catholic Committee's few parliamentary allies, who were named by Lord Lieutenant Westmorland as Grattan, Curran and Egan, one Catholic Dubliner was able to report to his provincial relative, 'Denis Browne has taken a very active part and declares he will support the business to the last'.¹⁹⁷ Although he was also able to substantiate that 'Grattan, he also professes himself a friend of the Catholics',¹⁹⁸ he could not list many other supporters within the Irish House of Commons. Even the opposition Whig party was not united behind the Catholic cause or the Catholic Committee. MacNeven explained in his retrospective account that 'the members of the opposition were by no means agreed as to the Catholic claims ... In order, therefore, to preserve the appearance of co-operation and unanimity the club remained intentionally silent on these two vital questions'.¹⁹⁹ With no support from the government or the majority of Irish MPs and with a silent opposition, therefore, the Catholic Committee was forced to rely on the assistance of only a few MPs in presenting their specially prepared petition.

Richard Burke, who was the sole composer of the Catholic Committee's original petition of 1792, had attempted to forge connections with Irish Whig MPs and had attended opposition party meetings at their Dublin headquarters in Leinster House. In a recollection contained in *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan, Volume IV*, a description is given of one particular evening in January when Burke 'coming in late and rather flushed after dinner, he gave the party a long string of resolutions, which he did not take the trouble of reading to the meeting, but in

¹⁹⁷ National Library of Ireland, *Bellews of Mount Bellew Papers*, MS 27, 145 [Christopher Bellew to Christopher Dillon Bellew, 11 February 1792].

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 29.

an authoritarian manner desired that they would be presented to the House'.²⁰⁰ The memoir goes on to explain that he later changed the form of the resolutions into an essay 'making an argumentative and oratorical composition – certainly clever, but by no means fit for a petition to Parliament'.²⁰¹ The petition's unconventional form made the important and sympathetic opposition MPs, such as Grattan and Curran, uncomfortable and drove them to recommend changes. Burke insisted that he had 'endeavoured to make it as affecting as I could and such as in some measure to defend itself and make an impression, which I think ought to be the case in anything we do - nothing dry, crude or in a common manner'.²⁰² He also explained that Grattan's friend, Egan, who was going to introduce the petition, changed his mind upon seeing it:

He proposed alterations in it, which as a composition entirely destroyed it ... All these alterations seemed most material and I saw in their discourse a disposition to betray the cause if it suited their convenience and at all events to worm me out of the respect and confidence of my employers.²⁰³

Faced with the criticism of the Irish Whigs, therefore, Richard Burke instead turned to another MP, Charles O'Hara of County Sligo, to present the petition in an unaltered state. Lord Lieutenant Westmorland provided a very colourful description of the entire episode in a letter to Secretary of State Dundas:

This composition was shown to Egan, Curran and Grattan, who were inclined to present and support it, but they struck out some objectionable words ... Mr. Burke would not permit an iota to be altered, of course these gentlemen declined. Burke proposed sending a challenge to Egan for his refusal upon pretence that he had promised. Mr. O'Hara was next pitched upon, he begged leave to read it, but Burke would not consent to that and O'Hara agreed.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 57.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁰² P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 46 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke].

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46 [Westmorland to Dundas, 28 January 1792].

With Charles O'Hara's contribution, Richard Burke and the Catholic Committee settled on 25 January to present their petition, the date when Sir Langrishe had planned to request leave to introduce his bill. On the appointed day, following Langrishe's long and persuasive speech to explain the legislation, in compliance with their plan, O'Hara stepped forward to present Burke's petition on behalf of the Catholic Committee. The Irish MP pointed out to the crowded House of Commons the benefits to hearing from the Catholics themselves, 'if we now were in possession of a statement of their wishes made by themselves, we might easily draw the line by the new act of Parliament so strongly as to preclude any expectation of change'.²⁰⁵ He then elaborated on the series of events which had led to his presentation. In particular, he told the House that 'he did not know the petitioners', but that a 'friend who was not of the Roman Catholic persuasion, [most likely Richard Burke], had desired him to present such a statement as a personal favour'.²⁰⁶ O'Hara attempted to vouch for his friend's integrity but did not wish to be considered the 'particular patron' of the Catholic petition. This unusual introduction, unfortunately, was followed by denunciation and very strong expressions of concern over the authorship of the intended petition. The administration's own Solicitor General was particularly adamant, reportedly exclaiming 'the petition in its present state of abandonment can be of no object of notice, such a petition so managed I never have heard of before'.²⁰⁷ This vocal opposition ultimately drove O'Hara to withdraw the petition on the official grounds that 'he could not say he had seen the petitioners sign it'.²⁰⁸

Prior to this final withdrawal, Richard Burke also made an extremely public and almost infamous social and procedural faux pas, which was later discussed throughout

²⁰⁵ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), 40.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Dublin. In writing to his father on 29 January, Burke showed particular sympathy for the Sligo MP, 'Poor O'Hara <bedevilled> the petition and after all did not present it; he was in truth perfectly frightened'.²⁰⁹ On the afternoon of 25 January in the Irish Parliament, Burke displayed a similar concern at the unexpected turn of events by attempting to enter the House to confer with O'Hara. This inappropriate action resulted in a brief interruption to the debate and a general outcry throughout the chamber. *The Parliamentary Register* contains a record of the event: 'Mr. Burke ... having incautiously ventured into the body of the House behind the Speaker's chair to speak with Mr. O'Hara, there arose a general cry of *into custody!* – He however withdrew time enough to avoid it'.²¹⁰ Chief Secretary Hobart also provided a detailed and thorough eye-witness account:

[O'Hara] quitted his seat and was crossing the House, when Mr. Burke who had been admitted into the gallery, rushed suddenly down into the House and came forward as far as the Speaker's chair. This inadvertent impropriety gave the most universal and violent offence and there was a general call of custody and an order to the sergeant-at-arms to take into custody any stranger who should come into the body of the House ... I was very glad that Mr. Burke had the discretion to retire and avoid the execution of the order.²¹¹

In relating the incident to his father, Richard Burke merely sought to reassure him and to downplay the incident by describing it as a 'scrape'. He explained that 'in endeavouring to get somebody to bring O'Hara to me I got behind the Speaker's chair ... and I was not more in the House than I should be in England if a yard or two outside the bar'.²¹² Burke was additionally certain that the House's response showed a

²⁰⁹ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 45-6.

²¹⁰ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), 41.

²¹¹ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 - 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Scope Bernard, 25 January 1792].

²¹² P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 47 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke, 29 January 1792].

personal animosity towards him and he insisted that Hobart himself had called for him to be taken into custody. Standing his ground with determined resolve, Burke proclaimed, 'both ministers and opposition have made every effort to destroy me with my friends, but I have stood the seasoning'.²¹³

Following this exceptionally bungled and failed attempt at presenting a petition to the Irish House of Commons on 25 January, Richard Burke and the Catholic Committee retreated to reconsider their strategy. Burke's original, unusual petition was cast into oblivion, but later published for public interest. It was instead replaced by a second, more conventional Catholic petition, which was then presented by the important opposition MP, John Egan, several days later on 18 February.

Burke's original petition had been extremely long, verbose and almost poetic. It employed dramatic phrases such as, 'for near a hundred years we and our fathers and our grandfathers had groaned under a code of laws ... the like of which no age, no nation, no climate ever saw' and 'it is a part of our calamities that we do not know how to tell them with propriety; and if our complaints should deviate into remonstrance and we should seem to upbraid when we mean to supplicate, we trust a due allowance will be made for expressions extorted by our anguish'.²¹⁴ The second petition of 1792, however, was more concise, professional and standard in form. Egan read this petition aloud on 18 February, proclaiming that it been 'signed by 50 of the most respectable commercial characters in this city'.²¹⁵ Hobart was able to affirm that this petition employed 'moderate and constitutional forms',²¹⁶ while MacNeven described it as

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers 620/19/64 [*Petition Intended to have Been Presented, February 1792*].

²¹⁵ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), 125.

²¹⁶ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 - 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Scrope Bernard, 20 February 1792].

‘couched in language the most humble’.²¹⁷ Although much briefer and more appropriate than the first petition, the second petition still managed to cause tremendous controversy in the Irish Parliament. Despite containing repeated assurances of loyalty and submission to law, Egan’s concise petition asked the house to consider whether:

The restoration of the petitioners to some share in the elective franchise which they enjoyed long after the Revolution will not tend to strengthen the Protestant state, add new vigour to industry, and afford protection and happiness to the Catholics of Ireland.²¹⁸

The inclusion of a request for the franchise, therefore, sent shockwaves through the Irish House of Commons and ultimately resulted in several days of prolonged and heated debate, during which numerous streams of insulting slander were spit out and directed specifically at the Catholic Committee.

On 18 February, Hercules Langrishe’s Catholic Relief bill underwent its second reading after a postponement of seven days, which was made at the request of the House in order to print and distribute copies of the bill throughout the country. The day opened not with the presentation of the Catholic Committee’s petition, but of a petition in support of the Catholic cause from 350 Protestants of County Antrim. This petition, which was the second Ulster Protestant petition submitted in 1792 in support of the Catholic cause, expressed the sincere desire that the petitioners ‘will feel themselves happy that the Roman Catholics should receive every liberal immunity consistent with the spirit of our glorious Constitution’.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, pp. 25-6.

²¹⁸ Frank MacDermott, *Theobald Wolfe Tone* (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd, 1939), p. 93.

²¹⁹ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), 124 [MP O’Neil].

After a brief discussion between Grattan, Langrishe, and the Attorney General over whether the new bill could be amended to permit Catholics to take certain academic degrees at the University of Dublin, Egan stepped forward to read and present the Catholic Committee's petition. Almost immediately questions arose regarding the authorship of Egan's petition and one Irish MP promptly labelled the petitioners 'a Roman Catholic convention sitting in Dublin'.²²⁰ Although Egan's strong protestations in response helped to ensure that the petition was received by the House, he was not able to restrain the other Irish MPs from denouncing the Catholic Committee and its members or from calling into question the propriety of their request for enfranchisement.

MPs referred to certain Catholic publications as 'wild, visionary and indiscrete',²²¹ and certain Catholic activists as 'the partisans of sedition'.²²² Distinctions were drawn between Kenmare's supporters and other Catholic activists who had purportedly been 'seduced into measures of madness'.²²³ Even Richard Burke may have been implicated by being described as one of the Committee's 'rash counsels', 'giddy counsellors' or 'needy adventurers and forward missionaries; men mean enough to be their flatterers and mercenary enough to be their stipendiaries'.²²⁴ Although Egan, Grattan and Curran all spoke in defence of the Catholic cause, the opposition members were unable to subdue the inflammatory temper of the Irish Parliament. As the day came to an end, therefore, the heated debates were scheduled to continue two days later on 20 February.

On Monday, 20 February 1792, once again the discussion in the Irish House of Commons centred on the Catholic Committee's petition. In a slightly new

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 126 [MP Ogle].

²²¹ Ibid., p. 131 [MP Hardy].

²²² Ibid., p. 148 [MP Knox].

²²³ Ibid., p. 148 [MP Knox].

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 155 [MP Knox].

development, however, the Irish MPs' insults became personal. The names of leading Catholic Committee members were introduced and publicly slandered, while the Catholic Committee's claim to represent the voice of Catholic Ireland was disputed. MP Sir James Cotter commented, 'This petition purported to be on the part of the Roman Catholics of Ireland, he would ask how they could vouch that it was on the part of the Roman Catholics?' ²²⁵ Similarly, Lord Headford stated, 'the petition, he looked upon as the production of those men whose inflammatory and seditious publications had with justice drawn down upon them the obloquy and censure of every sensible man and loyal subject in the kingdom'. ²²⁶ Among the most specifically directed and personal attacks, however, was made by MP Boyle Roche:

There was indeed, Mr. Edward Byrne, a sugar baker, a seller of wines and other commodities and he was the first name and put in the front of the battle. There was another, John Keogh; and who was he? Why, he was a retailer of poplins in Dame Street. These men met over their porter to consider of commanding the government. They met at a chop-house, at Derham's chop-house in particular, where the former of them in his cups happened to dream that he was a nabob of Ireland. Were these the representatives of the Roman Catholic nobility and gentry? No. Was there one respectable name amongst them? No. These fellows ... represented themselves and misrepresented the Catholics of Ireland. ²²⁷

Following these exceptional insults the sympathetic MPs did attempt to defend the Catholic activists, insisting that they were respectable citizens and 'traders amongst the most wealthy and important in your country'. ²²⁸ Grattan unequivocally stated that Edward Byrne was 'one of the first merchants in Ireland, his credit would go further than the character of most of our modern courtier-placemen'. ²²⁹ Despite these positive arguments, however, the overall opinion in the House remained unchanged and was,

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 185.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

²²⁷ Ibid., pp. 185-6.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 197 [MP Egan].

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 225.

therefore, in favour of following a suggestion proposed by MP David LaTouche, to reject Egan's petition, although it had been received two days earlier. This action took place with a parliamentary majority of 208 to a mere 23. The document was accordingly removed and the Irish House of Commons refused to recognise the 1792 petition of the Catholic Committee of Ireland.

Along with the Catholic Committee's petition, the Irish Parliament ultimately rejected the first Ulster petition submitted in support of the Catholic cause in 1792. This petition had been signed by over 600 men from Belfast and was presented on 8 February. After being read aloud by its sponsor, MP John O'Neil, it encouraged a brief debate and was initially accepted and permitted to lie on the table. Like Egan's petition, however, the Belfast petition requested specific relief, 'that the legislature would please to repeal all penal and restrictive laws against the Roman Catholics'²³⁰ and was, therefore, later rejected with the Catholic petition. Richard Burke observed that 'our petition has had a companion in its misfortune; the Belfast petition. Dissenter and Catholic are turned adrift together'.²³¹

Eye-witnesses of the debates in Parliament on 18 and 20 February confirmed the highly dramatic scenes. The Earl of Shannon told his son that the 'principal cause of unanimity' was Egan's petition, which 'occasioned a debate on the question of its rejection that lasted 'til two in the morning'.²³² Richard Burke also wrote to his father a few days later to describe and capture the events he had witnessed:

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 82 [MP O'Neil].

²³¹ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 72 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke, 23 February 1792].

²³² National Library of Ireland, MS 13, 303 'Calendar of Letters from Richard 2nd Earl of Shannon to his son, Henry, Viscount Boyle' [1 March 1792].

On the Monday the ministers rallied and on LaTouche's motion and during Sir Boyle Roche's ridiculous insolence and ribaldry ... It is impossible to conceive the scoffs and shouts of the House. It was really more like an assembly of Yahoos. Then all the fiery Protestants got up and unbottled their nonsense. When they had exhausted themselves they began to be a little ashamed of themselves.²³³

Chief Secretary Hobart came to wish the petition had never been presented and even speculated that it 'was not presented with a sincere interest to assist the Roman Catholics'.²³⁴ Because the Catholic Committee had been aware of the Irish Parliament's aversion to granting the franchise, Hobart personally suspected 'the object of the petition was to prejudice the bill'.²³⁵ Regardless of the Committee's true motives in preparing it, however, Hobart showed particular insight when he recognised:

The petition had been ordered to lie on the table and, as there was no probability that any man on the House would have moved for a compliance with it, it would have slept in oblivion, whereas the rejection of it was likely to be considered as an insulting triumph, which might drive the Roman Catholics to despair.²³⁶

The heated debates over the issues of Langrishe's bill, Egan's petition, and Irish Catholic rights in general were not only confined to the Irish legislature. Interest in these subjects captured the attention of all of Ireland during the parliamentary session of 1792. One correspondent writing to the Catholic Lord Fingall on 10 February described the scenes in the Irish Commons: 'before one o'clock this day the galleries of the House were filled almost totally with the fair sex and many attempted to get places who could not succeed'.²³⁷ He went on to explain that this popular interest extended beyond Parliament, as well: 'it is expected that out-of-doors in College Green there will

²³³ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 70 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke, 23 February 1792].

²³⁴ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Scrope Bernard, 21 February 1792].

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ National Library of Ireland, Fingall MSS 8021 [H. Wilson to Fingall, 10 February 1792].

be an amazing strong convention this afternoon ... It is expected that the bill will pass without division and because that the outside convention may probably debate and use some hard arguments'.²³⁸ The Earl of Shannon also described this phenomenon and accurately captured the mood in Ireland on 1 March 1792: 'the bill brought in by Sir Hercules Langrishe for removing certain restraints to which the papists were subject has engrossed not only the attention of Parliament, but the whole conversation, or rather wrangling, of private society'.²³⁹

The Catholic Committee was similarly caught up in the fervour generated during the Irish parliamentary session of 1792. The General Committee had been holding regular weekly meetings and had been maintaining close communications with provincial Catholics throughout February 1792. Official expressions of gratitude were relayed to the petitioners of Belfast, who had supported the Catholic cause. The Committee also resolved on 28 January to attempt to respond publicly to some of the misrepresentations expressed in and out of the Irish House of Commons, 'it appears necessary ... that resolutions should be entered into to refute certain imputations and calumnies which have gone forth injurious to the loyalty and good conduct of the Catholics of Ireland'.²⁴⁰

The sub-committee members appointed to the task of overseeing this intended publication included John Keogh, Randall McDonnell, Theobald McKenna, Dr. MacNeven, Thomas Braughall, Richard McCormick and Dr. Ryan, some of the most outspoken activists in the Catholic Committee. *An Address from the General Committee of Roman Catholics, to their Protestant Fellow Subjects, and to the Public in General, Respecting the Calumnies and Misrepresentations Now So Industriousl*

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ National Library of Ireland, MS 13, 303 'Calendar of Letters from Richard 2nd Earl of Shannon to his son, Henry, Viscount Boyle' [1 March 1792].

²⁴⁰ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 149-50.

Circulated was, therefore, duly completed, printed, and distributed in the first week of February. This pamphlet enumerated the Committee's four major objectives, 'admission to the profession and practice of law; capacity to serve in county magistracies; a right to be summoned and to serve on grand and petty juries', and finally, 'the right of voting in counties only for Protestant members of Parliament ... a Roman Catholic freeholder should not vote unless he either rented and cultivated a farm of £20 per annum in addition to his 40 shilling freehold, or else possesses a freehold to the amount of £20 a year'.²⁴¹

In addition to a general reiteration of the Committee's desired relief, the committee members also employed strong and powerful language to defend themselves and their cause in the public address of February 1792. They disputed rumours that they sought 'unlimited and total emancipation' or that they had spoken 'in a tone of menace'.²⁴² The address also stated that the Committee had expected public support:

... if [only] ... the most powerful exertions had not been employed to poison and alarm the public mind. ... Sophistic arguments derived from a mixture of confused ideas and false principles, have been fabricated, to traduce our motives, and to misconstrue our legal and temperate pursuit of rational liberty, into a struggle for unjust domination.²⁴³

The public address then went on to defend the names and characters of the committee members themselves and to insist that they were 'of the first respectability in every class' and that because the greatest share of Roman Catholic property was vested in trade, 'a much *greater* proportion of [the landed interest] is with the Committee than with the followers of Lord Kenmare'.²⁴⁴ Finally, in the public address of February

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²⁴² *An Address from the General Committee of Roman Catholics, to their Protestant Fellow Subjects, and to the Public in General, Respecting the Calumnies and Misrepresentations Now So Industiously Circulated - February 4, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. v.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9 & 10.

1792 the authors chose to adopt abstract philosophical arguments for the first time to defend the Committee's actions in pursuit of Irish Catholic relief and even to advance a claim of right:

The institution of a claim of *right* ... seems to us not very well to accord with, but rather to wipe away the charge of sedition and turbulence. ... But if it were true (which it is not) that we had *demand*ed admission into the constitution as our *right*, we cannot help remarking, that it would have been only a reason for a more exact and scrupulous attention, to that our requisition. ... We beg leave to observe, that there is nothing in itself insolent or offensive in a claim of right.²⁴⁵

The Catholic Committee had entered into the 1792 session of the Irish Parliament filled with optimistic expectations. Although there was a generally held anger towards dissenting Catholic factions, such as the Kenmarites, and some committee members may have privately shared Richard Burke's mistrust of the Irish administration, never before had the Catholic Committee displayed disappointment or frustration with the Irish Protestant gentry that constituted the Dublin Parliament. In the public address of February 1792, however, this was one of their primary audiences. As a result, this publication more than any previous pamphlet, signified the change which occurred in the Catholic Committee during the winter of 1792 and foreshadowed the unconventional tactics which the Committee would later employ throughout the remainder of the year.

After watching Langrishe's Catholic relief bill receive its final reading and pass out of the Irish House of Commons, the Catholic Committee decided to publish and distribute a second pamphlet, clarifying its stance with regard to critical points of religious and political doctrine, entitled *The Declaration Adopted by the General Committee, March 17, 1792, and Subscribed by the Catholics of Ireland*. This

²⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 24-25.

comprehensive, official declaration, which resembled the 1789 *Protestation* of the Catholics of England, concentrated on frequently misunderstood aspects of eighteenth-century Irish Catholic belief. Widely supported by the Catholics of Ireland and endorsed by leading clergymen, it sought to reassure the Irish public and to remove their fears by declaring that the Pope did not possess the authority to absolve subjects from their allegiance to the king; that Catholics were not permitted to murder Protestants as heretics and that faith could be kept with heretics; that the Pope could not absolve Catholics from an oath of allegiance; that the fallible Pope had no jurisdiction within the realm of Ireland; and, also, that the Pope could not absolve a Catholic of sin. A final resolution asserted that the Catholics of Ireland 'SOLEMNLY DISCLAIM and for EVER RENOUNCE all INTEREST in, and TITLE to, all FORFEITED LANDS ... or any CLAIM, TITLE or INTEREST therein'.²⁴⁶ This official declaration also included the novel proposition that all Irish Catholics enfranchised in the future be obligated to swear an oath to defend 'the arrangement of property in this country as established by the different acts of attainder and settlement'.²⁴⁷

Following their controversial involvement in the presentation of Lord Kenmare's loyal address, the Irish Catholic clergy were comparatively prompt to give their approval to the Catholic Committee's March declaration. Without consulting Roman authorities, Archbishop Troy accepted the resolutions and encouraged Leinster bishops to behave similarly by agreeing that the pamphlet contained no claims contrary to Catholic doctrine. Aware of public criticism and feeling increasingly isolated from the Irish Catholic laity, modern historians may be correct in surmising that Troy 'felt

²⁴⁶ *The Declaration Adopted by the General Committee, March 17, 1792 and Subscribed by the Catholics of Ireland* (Dublin, 1792), p. 3.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

forced to oblige', ²⁴⁸ and to bow to public pressure in order to maintain any remaining authority.

The March declaration showed that, despite the disappointing concessions contained in Langrishe's bill, the slanderous statements made in the parliamentary debates, and the public rejection of the Catholic Committee's petition, the Irish Catholic activists were determined to continue their campaign. Well paraphrased by Richard Burke writing to his father in late February, 'the great thing is to keep the subject in agitation. This is what the other side dreads'. ²⁴⁹ At a general meeting of the Catholic householders of Dublin, which was called by the Catholic Committee and held in the Music Hall on Friday, 23 March, in order to secure signatures for the Committee's declaration, Edward Byrne also stated, 'the general adoption of the Declaration throughout the kingdom must tend strongly to dispel the unjust prejudices so long entertained against the Catholics'. ²⁵⁰ Similarly, Randall McDonnell was able optimistically to observe that 'we have ... gained one great point, in despite of our opposers – we have brought our cause before our countrymen at large'. ²⁵¹

Throughout 1790 and 1791 the Catholic Committee had paid little attention to public opinion aside from their own Catholic constituents. Towards the close of the Irish parliamentary session of 1792, however, the Catholic Committee recognised that public support could not be expected or guaranteed without providing assurances of Catholic intentions or providing demonstrations of Catholic unity. This was partly accomplished through the increased production of explanatory pamphlets, which included documents written by Catholic Committee members as well as pro-Catholic

²⁴⁸ Vincent J. McNally, *Reform, Revolution and Reaction, Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the Catholic Church in Ireland, 1787-1817*, p. 51.

²⁴⁹ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 73 [Richard to Edmund Burke, 23 February 1792].

²⁵⁰ *A Report of the Debate which Took Place at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at the Music-Hall, Fishamble Street, Friday, March 23, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 3.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

letters and speeches by famous and knowledgeable Protestants, such as Edmund Burke, William Todd Jones, Henry Grattan and T. Wolfe Tone. The Catholic Committee Minute Book contained the direction 'to print off ten-thousand of each' ²⁵² item of political propaganda, which were then distributed by the Catholic Committee in its renewed effort to win over Irish public opinion in early 1792, following the failure of its more conservative and traditional campaign of 1791.

Another aspect of this change in approach involved the return of the Catholic Committee's agent to London. Richard Burke wrote on 1 March, 'I am beginning to think of my departure, which will be from hence in about three weeks'. ²⁵³ Following the political events of January and February and the final passage of Langrishe's bill, the Catholic Committee must have appreciated the futility of retaining Burke's assistance in Dublin. For, despite his complex stratagems and numerous ministerial meetings at Westminster in late 1791, Richard Burke had had little impact on the Catholic relief legislation which was ultimately drafted in 1792. This left the Committee questioning the utility of its approaches to government and doubting Richard's abilities as its agent.

The Catholic Committee also became deeply concerned to learn the current opinions of the British ministers in London, who had previously seemed so cooperative and supportive. Richard Burke felt abandoned by these same British ministers, who had never intervened to defend his reputation or to guarantee that the Irish Catholics should receive the relief comprehensively discussed in December 1791. Fearing the spread of damaging rumours, and announcing his return to England in a fortnight, Burke wrote to Secretary Dundas on 14 March, 'a supposition of some sort of failure on

²⁵² R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 156.

²⁵³ Marshall, P. J. and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, p. 88 [Richard Burke to Richard Burke Snr., 1 March 1792].

my part in this respect can alone account for a visible alienation in you towards me and all that I take an interest in'.²⁵⁴ Despite these suspicions, however, he did successfully communicate with Dundas in early April 1792, shortly after his return to London. The Catholic Committee's representative tried to uphold his agency and to discover for his patrons ministerial opinion at Westminster, 'I am to tell you that I am bound by a very solemn promise to inform the Catholics precisely how their interests stand with the English government and indeed I left Ireland much sooner than they would otherwise have permitted me'.²⁵⁵ Burke pleaded with the British Secretary of State not to refer the matter of the Irish Catholics back to the governing Protestants in Dublin and he explained that the Catholics wondered 'whether their king has abandoned them to the absolute discretion of his Irish servants'.²⁵⁶ In a further effort to uphold the Irish Catholic cause at Westminster, Richard Burke provided British ministers with a copy of the Catholic Committee's March declaration, which clarified points of religious doctrine. Despite these efforts, however, evidence suggests that he was unable to supply the desired information to the Catholic Committee.

Edmund Burke had also tried to meet with Dundas to discuss Irish Catholic relief in mid-February. Burke's account of this interview, however, had indicated the minister's refusal to divulge privileged information or to cater to private interests that fell outside official government circles. Edmund Burke described how Dundas 'did not open a word of discourse about Ireland. I introduced it. He preserved a dead silence and heard me like a man who wished an unpleasant conversation at an end'.²⁵⁷ Dundas must have maintained this approach to the subject throughout the spring of 1792, similarly refusing to respond adequately to Richard Burke's enquiries in April. This

²⁵⁴ National Library of Ireland, Dundas MS 54 [14 March 1792].

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, [6 April 1792].

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Thomas H. D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 186.

ultimately caused Edward Byrne to write to the agent on 28 May 1792 to tell him, 'we were sorry ... and disappointed that you were not able to give us some decisive intelligence how far the English ministry were willing to go in relieving us from our distressed situation or whether they were willing to go any lengths at all'.²⁵⁸

Despite helping to provide Richard with a parting salary of 2,000 guineas in March and maintaining an irregular correspondence with him throughout the rest of the year, John Keogh also explained, 'we found the English ministers would not negotiate in England. We, therefore, did not want a negotiator of which he was informed, wishing to close amicable and respectfully'.²⁵⁹ Reflecting on the dramatic events of January and February several months later, however, Keogh reconsidered the true nature of Burke's participation and described the actions taken by the agent in a far more derogatory manner:

In the course of a few weeks last winter, he contrived to quarrel with the leading men in government here, though recommended by letters from Mr. Pitt. He gave great offence to the gentlemen in opposition, in so much that some of them declared they would do no business whatsoever with him ... and, in fine, treated ourselves with so little consideration he would not suffer our opinion to have weight, even in our own affairs, whenever it differed from his.²⁶⁰

Richard Burke's departure from Dublin and eventual break with the Irish Catholic Committee, therefore, was an ignominious failure on the part of the agent and his intended mission, also reflecting the overall failure of the Committee's attempts at holding direct negotiations with government ministers in order to obtain the desired relief. If the Catholic Committee stood any chance of succeeding in its endeavours, it

²⁵⁸ National Library of Ireland, Dundas MS 54 [*Extracts of a Letter from Mr. Byrne, Chairman of the Catholic Committee to Richard Burke*].

²⁵⁹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [John Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792].

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

would have to explore more unconventional approaches, a tactical alteration which was first attempted in the spring of 1792.

Following this failure of Richard Burke's attempted negotiations with British ministers, the Catholic Committee was forced to steady its resolve and to devise new tactics for 1792 in anticipation of the parliamentary session of 1793. Before concluding the regular meetings of the General Committee on 21 April, the Committee re-elected most of the same members of the sub-committee, placing renewed trust in them to continue their unofficial duties on behalf of the Catholic cause throughout the spring and summer of 1792. Addresses of thanks were presented to Dr. Theobald McKenna, Edward Byrne, and John Keogh, the last of whom was specifically cited for helping 'to restore the General Committee to the sense and practice of their duties and the Catholic community to the knowledge and assertion of their rights'.²⁶¹ Finally, before adjourning for over two months, the Catholic Committee agreed to pursue a novel and wide-ranging plan, credited to committee member, Myles Keon. This new plan required members of the sub-committee to travel throughout the counties of Ireland and to raise support for an increased participation of county gentlemen and national delegates to build a more inclusive and representative body of Irish Catholics, a gruelling task which was assigned to four parties of two men including Keogh, Byrne, McCormick and Braughall.

John Keogh had asked, at the public gathering of Catholic householders in Dublin on 23 March, 'why are we thus reduced to slavery? For slavery it is ... and that without crime'.²⁶² At this same meeting before the assembled audience he confessed his 'severe' disappointment at the scanty relief rewarded by Langrishe's act. The Catholic

²⁶¹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 163.

²⁶² *A Report of the Debate Which Took Place at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at the Music-Hall, Fishamble Street, Friday, March 23, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 14.

activist reiterated the Committee's and his own hope 'for such a relief as would have afforded protection (not power) to our unfortunate peasantry'.²⁶³ He insisted that the 'elective franchise is not a struggle for power. It is necessary to protect the poor from utter misery, from worse than death'.²⁶⁴ This determination, therefore, strongly influenced the Committee's actions throughout 1792. Keogh and the other members of the Catholic Committee resolved to fight for the restoration of the elective franchise. Writing to Reverend Hussey in London on 29 March, Keogh was able to state, 'the sentiments of our meeting 23rd inst. are evidence that the Catholics feel their situation truly and that nothing can relieve them but elective franchise'.²⁶⁵

Resolute in its object and armed with innovative tactics for obtaining its goal, therefore, the Catholic Committee was able to take the lessons it had learned in 1791 and during the Irish Parliament of 1792 and try to turn them to its future advantage. For the first time the Catholic leaders understood that their opposition in the Irish Parliament and the doubts of the Irish public had to be addressed and overcome before relief would be granted. To accomplish this, the Irish Catholics would have to resolve their own internal conflicts, stop in-fighting, and work together to defeat their mutual enemy, the anti-Catholic sentiments still raging throughout conservative Protestant circles in Ireland. Fortunately, the Catholic Committee found itself simultaneously at a terrible low point, with the resounding failure of traditional politics, and yet in an unprecedented position of strength. The Irish administration's efforts at restraining the Catholic movement and the extraordinary pronouncements made in the Irish Parliament had the unexpected side-effects of sparking nationwide interest among Irish Catholics

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁶⁵ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/240-243 [Keogh to Rev. Hussey, 29 March 1792].

and helping to rouse their indignation. John Keogh succinctly captured this national mood in Ireland on 29 March 1792:

Where it was their wish to separate and instead of silencing or getting rid of the subject it provoked discussion of the question of restoring us to the Elective Franchise – which was the sole intention of our presenting the petition. Administration being against us we knew we could not succeed in parliament, but the question is now before the nation. Every man's mind in this country is in a ferment at present, some violent against us ... others beginning to think it a measure likely to be obtained at a remote day.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/240-243 [Keogh to Rev. Hussey, 29 March 1792].

CHAPTER FIVE

The Triumph of the Catholic Committee: Allies and Organisation

I

The Plan for Elections

As an indication of the Irish Catholic Committee's renewed efforts, a new and innovative plan for reorganising the Committee was prepared, introduced and read aloud by Myles Keon of County Leitrim at a meeting of the General Committee on 21 April 1792. The Catholic Committee Minute Book contains references to the proposal 'that a greater attendance of county gentlemen be procured by obtaining delegates from the several counties to this committee', ¹ a suggestion which constituted the primary aim of the new plan. Also, the Minute Book demonstrates the Committee's overall support by stating 'we think the plan read in this committee by Mr. Keon be submitted to the gentlemen of each county and recommended for their adoption'. ² In order to pursue their new scheme in a careful and organised manner, however, the sub-committee members preferred to deliberate and fine-tune essential details before making a public pronouncement. Moreover, to help clarify and better promote the plan, it was resolved in April that certain sub-committee members should be required 'to travel through the several counties of Ireland to explain the necessity and probable advantage of these measures'. ³ This insistence on organised planning contributed to a slight delay, ultimately resulting in the production of a national circular over one month later in late May 1792.

¹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 165.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Finalised at a meeting of the sub-committee on 26 May and later known as *The Letter Said to be Signed 'Edward Byrne' With its Accompanying 'Plan on the Manner of Conducting the Election of Delegates'*, this national circular was thorough and detailed in its explanation. Richard Burke later called it 'a plan adopted with great deliberation, formally announced and systematically prosecuted'.⁴ Lord Lieutenant Westmorland transmitted a copy to Westminster on 7 June 1792, speculating that the Committee intended 'to allure others and to intimidate their clergy into their schemes', while simultaneously hoping that 'the paper like all and other papers the Committee have produced may have no effect on the minds of the Catholics and that the country people may continue as little moved by this agitation as by the other means'.⁵ Despite his fervent wishes, however, Westmorland had to admit his great fear and to ask 'whether or no government ought to be prepared in some way or other against them'.⁶

The plan and introductory letter informed the Catholics of Ireland of the Committee's main object, which was 'to procure a fuller attendance of county gentlemen to assist by their advice and influence the measures adopted by the Committee'.⁷ It then went on to explain in greater detail how this goal could be accomplished, through regional elections. The circular laid out for the county Catholics the exact method of holding these elections. It specified that one or two respectable electors should be chosen to represent each parish and that these parish electors should then congregate at some central location to select from one to four local residents to assume responsibility for attending special gatherings of the General Committee in Dublin. Their names were to be transmitted to Secretary Richard McCormick and they

⁴ Richard Burke, *A Letter from Richard Burke, Esq. to ***** Esq. of Cork in which the Legality and Propriety of the Meeting Recommended in Mr. Byrne's Circular Letter are Discussed* (Cork, 1792), p. 34.

⁵ National Archives of Ireland, *Westmorland Correspondence*, Letter 1/56 [Westmorland to Dundas, 7 June 1792].

⁶ *Ibid.*, Letter 1/56.

⁷ *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, Edward Byrne, Esq. in the Chair, Resolved - that the Following Letter be Circulated on May 26, 1792* (Dublin, 1792) [single sheet only].

were immediately to pass resolutions supporting an Irish Catholic application to the king that requested both the parliamentary franchise and trial by jury.

The Catholic Committee had previously been open to all Catholic gentry, who were not deputed by any constituent body and who were, therefore, not answerable for their actions. Myles Keon's new plan, however, intended to promote Catholic unity by involving in the Committee's activities the landed gentry, who were actual residents of the places they represented, while also ensuring their good behaviour:

Men appointed by others must hold themselves accountable to those from whom they derive their trust; and, therefore, must regulate their conduct by the standard of general opinion. ... Under a system which is thus representative, and where the trust is revocable at pleasure, seduction cannot be practised nor can division again take place.⁸

An additional component of the new plan also involved the obligatory attendance of the elected delegates at General Committee meetings in Dublin on 'important occasions'. Although these special occasions were likely to be infrequent, the country delegates were invited to attend any regular meeting and also to maintain steady and ongoing correspondence with a select committee member who was a permanent resident in Dublin. The circular explained that 'our plan, by making attendance a duty, will ... serve to bring a greater number of county gentlemen into the Committee than have formerly appeared among us'.⁹ It was hoped that this system of increased inclusion would enable the Catholic Committee to 'speak the sentiments of its constituent members with distinctness and precision and that the country parts of the kingdom will be provided with the surest means of acquiring whatever information may be necessary'.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In keeping with its new emphasis on unity and increased inclusion, the Catholic Committee was also able to announce publicly in the national circular an amicable reunion with the Kenmarite faction. This event occurred after the conservative Catholics had presented a new loyal address of thanks to Lord Lieutenant Westmorland in early May 1792. This address, which simply expressed 'grateful acknowledgements of the recent benefits conferred upon us by the legislature', ¹¹ had been opposed by the sub-committee, but it ultimately contributed to a resumption of communication between the two Catholic parties.

John Keogh provides details of this reconciliation and also shows how it contributed to a delay in the sub-committee's springtime activities in a letter to Richard Burke on 17 May. Keogh explained, 'I was preparing for the interior parts of Ireland on our common business until intercepted by the late address of thanks from Lord Fingall and Kenmare and their followers ... this address created us much additional business'. ¹² He then described the events that led the two factions to reopen communications: 'we sent them resolutions to deter them, they, the addressors, sounded men of influence in the Committee to endeavour to procure the Committee to join in thanks – they failed in that'. ¹³ Ultimately, Keogh was able to tell his associate in London: 'we had yesterday a meeting with some gentlemen addressors and are promised that Lord Fingall and that party will give the Committee no further opposition in our pursuits for emancipation'. ¹⁴

This apparent reversal by the Kenmarite conservative Catholics may have been influenced by the anti-Catholic statements made during the Irish parliamentary session of 1792 or by the scanty relief included in Langrishe's bill. Additionally, the

¹¹ National Library of Ireland, Dundas MS 54 [*Address of the Catholics of May 1792 to Lord Lieutenant Earl of Westmorland*].

¹² Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2658 [John Keogh to Richard Burke, 17 May 1792].

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Kenmarites would have been aware of the public criticism that the views of the Catholic Committee did not truly represent the opinions of the Irish Catholic body and that certain other Catholic activists had expressed their complete faith in the wisdom of the Irish legislature. The Kenmarites, therefore, could not have failed to appreciate the effect that their actions had had in confusing the Irish public, misleading the Irish parliament, and hindering Catholic relief efforts. This may have contributed to a dwindling of the numbers of active, obstructionist Catholic conservatives. Finally, it is possible that the conciliatory involvement of the Earl of Fingall may have helped to supersede other conservative leaders and prevent further opposition to the Catholic Committee.

Lord Fingall, who had previously expressed concern over Lord Kenmare's motives, displayed his own personal dedication to Catholic relief by sharing his feelings with his agent on 26 May and expressing his strong sentiments 'towards the welfare of every individual who acts as loyal and good subjects and are deserving of being treated and deemed such to ensure the happiness of a nation and its prosperity'.¹⁵ Despite their differences in method, therefore, ultimately the Kenmarites pursued the same goals as the Catholic Committee, that is, lasting relief for Irish Catholics from penal restrictions. The polarising influence of the 1792 Irish parliamentary debates helped the two factions to realise this fact and, eventually, to accomplish a reconciliation.

With its publication and dispersal at the end of May, the Catholic Committee's springtime circular describing the new plan for elections was perfectly timed to contain the important news of this welcome armistice. The introductory letter in the publication reassured the Catholics of Ireland that the new plan had been completely

¹⁵ National Library of Ireland, Fingall MSS 8035 [Lord Fingall to Chris Lynch, 26 May 1792].

sanctioned by both the Committee and the independent Catholic gentlemen who publicly proclaimed, 'that they will never again enter into any act to oppose the General Committee in their endeavours to obtain the emancipation of the Catholics'.¹⁶ The circular also contained an overview of some of the events which led to the agreement and some of the results anticipated from its successful execution:

Several respectable independent country gentlemen ... had frequent consultations for the laudable purpose of reuniting to the committee Lord Fingall and the other gentlemen who had withdrawn themselves from it. These country gentlemen had the satisfaction to find that the General Committee on one side and the gentlemen who had entered into separate addresses on the other mutually regretted their division; which they saw was used by the opponents of the Catholics as a pretext for withholding from our people the elective franchise and an equal participation in the benefits of the trial by jury. It is on all sides agreed that if the Catholics are all united in this just and reasonable request ... there will be a certainty of success.¹⁷

In addition to reopening communications with the Kenmarite party, the Catholic Committee conducted a series of discussions with Dr. Troy, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The sub-committee's intention of soliciting the support of the Catholic clergy in promoting their new plan for elections was contained in the May circular, where it was stated that 'every endeavour should be made to cultivate and improve the friendship of our clergy'.¹⁸ The publication accurately observed that 'the clergy and laity having but one interest should have but one mind' and, also, that by cooperating the Catholic clergy would help to 'secure to themselves that influence over the laity ... which it is useful that good clergy should have'.¹⁹ The Catholic Committee recognised the utility and importance of clerical involvement in the plan in order to speak in its defence, to oversee the election proceedings for each parish, and

¹⁶ *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, Edward Byrne, Esq. in the Chair, Resolved - that the Following Letter be Circulated on May 26, 1792 (Dublin, 1792) [single sheet only].*

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

also to address provincial concerns and doubts. Accordingly, as reported in the Catholic Committee Minute Book entry for 28 June 1792, the sub-committee informed the General Committee that, following their conferences, Archbishop Troy had:

Entered into those religious and patriotic views with a candour, zeal and sincerity that deserve the affection of his flock ... Our archbishop, to demonstrate these, his intentions, beyond a possibility of doubt wrote letters to every bishop in Ireland which he delivered to your sub-committee to forward.²⁰

Therefore, by using Myles Keon's innovative plan to provide new direction and reenergised by the reunited support of the Kenmarite conservatives and the Catholic clergy, the Irish Catholic Committee entered into the summer of 1792 in a position of strength with a renewed determination and an optimistic morale. The plan's success was vital to the Catholic cause as it was the best method to prove that, despite parliamentary criticism to the contrary, the Catholic Committee did represent the interests of all Catholic Ireland and was authorised by the Catholics to speak on their behalf. Armed with Troy's letters, the leading members of the sub-committee made preparations to undertake the essential but arduous task of travelling throughout Ireland to explain and support the Committee's plan for elections.

Prior to departing on this mission, however, a General Committee meeting was held on 28 June to apprise the Catholic Committee members of the sub-committee's successful actions in distributing the circular and securing widespread Irish Catholic support for its plan. Moreover, the sub-committee was re-elected to act freely for a further two months. Although many of the same activists were re-elected, certain individuals, including Theobald McKenna, were not; an event which may have anticipated his later estrangement from the rest of the Committee. Finally, at this

²⁰ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 167.

meeting resolves were introduced 'to endeavour to procure and engage a proper person to act as an assistant secretary until after the next session of parliament'.²¹ This person was to be 'a gentleman of integrity and ability', but should not be a committee member as it was decided that 'no member of this Committee shall be eligible to any employment in this Committee where payment of any kind is to be given'.²² The person ultimately confirmed in this position was the respected and outspoken Irish Protestant activist, Theobald Wolfe Tone, a man who had shown his support for the Catholic cause many months earlier.

Writing over a year later, T. W. Tone openly admitted that, 'when I first wrote a little book on the Catholic question, I was not acquainted with one member of their body'.²³ Despite this limitation, however, the pamphlet which appeared in August 1791, entitled *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, was widely acclaimed, highly influential and, ultimately, brought Tone to the attention of the Catholic Committee. This publication was addressed to the Irish Protestant Dissenters and its intended object, in Tone's own words, was:

to convince them that they and the Catholics had but one common interest and one common enemy; that the depression and slavery of Ireland was produced and perpetuated by the division existing between them.²⁴

Rather than prioritising Catholic suffering under the various penal restrictions, therefore, Tone was primarily concerned with the reform of Ireland's parliamentary representation, Irish legislative independence, and the obstacles to these goals presented by existing sectarian divisions.

²¹ Ibid., p. 168.

²² Ibid.

²³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 503.

²⁴ Ibid., i, 52.

Although overturning the penal system was not his primary concern, Tone publicly acknowledged Catholic suffering and displayed particular sympathy for the Catholics of Ireland, who he described as ‘men condemned to ignorance by the law of the land and whose minds have for a century been irritated by injuries and inflamed by open insults or still more offensive connivance and toleration’.²⁵ By citing recent events in France, he demonstrated that Catholics were equally capable of appreciating freedom and liberty, ‘the rights of man are at least as well understood there as here and somewhat better practised’.²⁶ Using arguments based more on ‘expediency’ than on mere right in his *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*, he even advanced a proposal for a Catholic franchise, which would have been limited to freeholders of £10 a year in order to counteract Protestant apprehensions. Tone called upon Ireland to ‘give them franchise as you have already, in a certain degree, given them property. Let them be citizens, let them be men’.²⁷ Most significantly for contemporary Irish Catholic activists, however, he accepted the true nature of the condition of Catholics in Ireland and, in asking the following questions, secured their firm respect, appreciation and attachment:

What answer could we make to the Catholics of Ireland if they were to rise, and with one voice, demand their rights as citizens and as men? What reply justifiable to God and to our conscience? None. We prate and babble and write books and publish them, filled with sentiments of freedom and abhorrence of tyranny and lofty praises of the Rights of Man! Yet we are content to hold three millions of our fellow creatures and fellow subjects in degradation and infamy and contempt, or to sum up all in one word, in SLAVERY!²⁸

²⁵ T. Wolfe Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, In Which the Present State of the Country, and the Necessity of a Parliamentary Reform are Considered ... [by] A Northern Whig* (Dublin, 1791), p. 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ T. Wolfe Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* (Dublin, 1791), p. 35.

These strong expressions of sympathy for the Irish Catholic cause won T. W. Tone widespread admiration and ushered him into the company of the leading Catholic activists in Ireland. He later explained that it had been fashionable during the winter of 1791-2 for these activists 'to give splendid dinners to their political friends in and out of Parliament'²⁹ and that, as a result of his early pamphlet and subsequent pro-Catholic publications, Tone was frequently invited to these events alongside other outspoken supporters, including William Todd Jones and Richard Burke. As a result of this social interaction, therefore, Tone befriended the most important members of the Catholic Committee and ultimately presented himself as a suitable candidate for the position of assistant secretary to the Catholic Committee.

In Tone's own autobiographical writings he suggested that John Keogh had proposed his appointment as assistant secretary simultaneous to Myles Keon's presentation of the plan for elections in late April 1792 and that he was then presented with a written offer, which he immediately accepted. The Catholic Committee Minute Book, however, first cites the vacancy on 28 June and does not actually contain T. W. Tone's name until 25 July, when it states that, proceeding from the earlier resolution to procure an assistant secretary, the sub-committee 'have engaged Theo. Wolfe Tone Esq. for that office until the end of the next session of Parliament'.³⁰ This appointment carried with it an annual salary of £200 and Tone was easily confirmed in his post following the approval of the larger General Committee. Although there is limited evidence to show that Tone acted as assistant secretary to the Committee in April or May 1792, by mid-June he claimed to have corresponded with Richard Burke at Westminster on behalf of the Committee and at the start of July, despite an absence of

²⁹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 53.

³⁰ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 169 [25 July].

evidence in the Minute Book, he was certainly participating in other Catholic Committee business.

Tone's own very detailed personal diary substantiated this claim in addition to containing essential evidence of Catholic Committee activity throughout the summer of 1792. According to Tone, on 4 July he was in Dublin holding meetings with Irish Whigs, but by 10 July he had arrived in Belfast to attend Bastille Day celebrations and to help promote the Catholic cause in the north. He was joined three days later by Richard McCormick and John Keogh, who had only departed Dublin on the twelfth, and then by Theobald McKenna, who arrived in Belfast on 14 July, the same day as the great event. In a letter to Richard Burke on 26 July, John Keogh captured the enormity of Belfast's Bastille Day celebrations by explaining: 'there were 810 Volunteers, about 20, 000 spectators in the field, at the meeting where the addresses were proposed about 5, 000'.³¹ Keogh also described the atmosphere at this important meeting, held in Belfast's Linen Hall after the military display, which helped to resolve the question of the city's support for the Catholic cause:

The meeting was conducted with the utmost decorum and solemnity. When the debate that took place on the Catholic question was nearly closed, some country corps, who had several miles to march home and who were fatigued with being twelve hours under arms, withdrew. There remained above 4, 000 persons when the question was put whether our emancipation should be immediate or gradual, and at the utmost there were not more than ten to vote for gradual.³²

T. W. Tone's account differed slightly as he estimated attendance at this 'grand assembly' at 6, 000 and he made mention of the public addresses delivered, which included William Drennan's address to the people of France and his own important

³¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2668 [26 July 1792, 'Extract of a Letter from Ireland'].

³² Ibid.

pro-Catholic address to the people of Ireland, which called for reform to be inclusive of 'all sects and denominations of Irishmen'.³³

The successful outcome of the Linen Hall vote towards the end of the day demonstrated the support that the Belfast Dissenters ultimately seemed to give to the Irish Catholic cause. Just as they had come forward with a sympathetic petition to parliament in February 1792, in the summer months John Keogh was able to report that Presbyterian clergymen preached pro-Catholic sermons, Volunteers passed pro-Catholic resolutions and the liberal Belfast newspaper, the *Northern Star*, carried public records of these resolves. Overall, he was pleased to conclude that 'the people of Belfast ... are very informed men, cool, reflecting and determined friends to justice and to liberty'.³⁴

These events in Ulster also suggested a shift by the Catholic Committee away from absolute, unquestioning loyalty to the government and towards an acceptance of more unconventional, reformist approaches. The appointment of Tone to the position of assistant secretary contrasted sharply with the Committee's earlier choice of Richard Burke as agent, the former being an avowed political reformer and the latter being recognised for his family's dedication to tradition and royal government. Several months earlier, despite their presentation of a sympathetic petition to parliament, the Catholic Committee had had virtually no contact with Northern Dissenters in Belfast. In the summer of 1792, however, this changed and the Catholic Committee embraced this valuable alliance and welcomed the support of certain Northern Protestant reformers.

³³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 68 & T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell & C. J. Woods (eds.), *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-1798*, vol. i (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 219 [14 July 1792, 'Address of the Volunteers Assembled at Belfast to the People of Ireland'].

³⁴ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2668 [26 July 1792, 'Extract of a Letter from Ireland'].

Although John Keogh, T. W. Tone, and the Catholic Committee pursued a policy aimed at fostering as many alliances and gaining as many friends as possible during the summer of 1792, there was one individual from whom they began to feel estranged. While the Committee began to become slightly more unconventional in approach, former outspoken activist, Theobald McKenna, followed a different course by appearing more politically cautious. Tone's diary contained a reference to a request made by McKenna at a dinner held in honour of the visiting Catholic activists in Belfast on 16 July to avoid certain controversial statements and not to 'embarrass the question with claims'.³⁵ Patrick Rogers has also observed that, after McKenna advocated a 'calming address' to ensure support for the Catholic cause at the Linen Hall meeting, Tone 'conceived a contempt and distrust for the Dublin doctor which the future conduct of the latter was to intensify'.³⁶ Tone's own diary supports this view as it describes a conversation between himself and Keogh on 15 July wherein McKenna was suspected of subversively opposing Tone's appointment and manoeuvring to prevent any mention of Catholic issues at the Linen Hall meeting:

[Keogh], likewise, tells me of an odd manoeuvre of the tribune [James Napper Tandy] and McKenna, endeavouring yesterday to get him and the Catholics to express something of a wish that their affairs should not be introduced so as to risk disturbing the harmony of the meeting ... which he and the Catholics did very properly refuse to do, saying they could not dictate to any men; but their wish was, that the question should be fairly tried; and if it was lost, let it be lost.³⁷

McKenna's actions in Belfast may have been partly motivated by mistrust of the Protestant reformers. According to Douglas Leighton, McKenna questioned the reliability of the Dissenters, whom he considered 'pseudo-philanthropists' who

³⁵ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 162. This dinner was described by Keogh as 'a sumptuous entertainment', Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2668 [26 July 1792, 'Extract of a Letter from Ireland'].

³⁶ Patrick Rogers, *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation, 1778-1793*, p. 267.

³⁷ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 160.

displayed no lasting compassion for the Irish Catholics.³⁸ Alternatively, McKenna may have adopted a general preference for political moderation. Regardless of the cause, however, the rift between McKenna and his former comrades had become very pronounced by July 1792, possibly explaining the reason that McKenna had not been re-elected to the Catholic Committee's sub-committee and certainly given ample demonstration in Tone's statement that McKenna was a person that Keogh 'hates worse than hell'.³⁹

While on their journey to Ulster for Belfast's Bastille Day, Keogh and Tone became involved in other political activities as well. Tone's diary contained an entry on 17 July in which a Northern associate proposed that they travel to the town of Rathfriland to investigate ongoing disturbances between poor local Protestants and Catholics and attempt 'to restore peace'.⁴⁰ Accordingly, the following day, three representatives from the Catholic Committee went to this rural area and met with local officials in an attempt to understand and resolve the conflict. Keogh's letter to Richard Burke contained a thorough explanation of the disturbances and the Committee's anticipated contribution. He described multiple examples of persecution, primarily the arming of 'the poorest Protestants, the very wretches who are reported to be the Peep-of-Day-Boys', who were blamed for 'attacking by night and day innocent and peaceable Catholics'.⁴¹ Keogh then explained:

³⁸ Douglas A. Leighton, 'Theobald McKenna and the Catholic Question' (unpublished MA thesis, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1985), p. 87.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 160 [15 July 1792].

⁴⁰ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 162.

⁴¹ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2668 [John Keogh to Richard Burke, 26 July 1792].

It is admitted on all hands that these Catholics have been attacked for years back – that they had contented themselves with showing their wounds and crying for protection, but in vain – that to preserve life ... many have lately purchased arms but that there has been no one instance in which the Catholics have retaliated or attacked the houses of their enemies, but merely defended themselves.⁴²

These rural, Ulster Catholics, who ultimately came to be known as ‘Defenders’, and the poor, rural Protestant Peep-O’-Day Boys had been accused of assembling and exercising with arms and of carrying on extended campaigns of violence, which local officials sought to end. It was stated in Keogh’s letter that, although the Catholic clergy had ‘lost their former influence’, the Catholic Committee ‘was looked up to by the Catholics and their interference would ... be effectual’.⁴³ The hope of local officials, therefore, was that the Catholic Committee would adopt the new role of mediator and speak with the voice of Catholic authority to convince the Defenders to cease their activities.

To attempt to quell the violence a meeting was called at which local Protestant gentlemen, Protestant clergy, a Catholic priest and the Catholic Committee’s representatives assembled to seek an effective solution. While the Protestant gentlemen believed that they could use persuasion to calm the Peep-O’-Day Boys, the Catholic Committee ultimately decided to prepare a letter addressed to the Catholic Defenders. A portion of this letter, which was approved at the General Committee meeting on 25 July, appeared in the *Northern Star* and the *Belfast Newsletter* at the end of July 1792 containing an assurance that if they maintained a ‘*peaceable demeanour, ... the General Committee will endeavour to secure for you all possible protections*’.⁴⁴ If the Defenders persisted in their armed activities, however, the Committee warned

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ John Sweetman, *A Refutation of the Charges Attempted to be Made Against the Secretary to the Subcommittee of the Catholics of Ireland, Particularly That of Abetting the Defenders* (Dublin, 1793), p. 5.

them: *'the General Committee will in no case undertake the defence of any man who shall assist in any riotous or disorderly meeting, or who shall not behave himself soberly, peaceably, and honestly'*.⁴⁵ In the more complete version of this pamphlet the Committee sought to convince them that *'there is no longer a necessity for your assembling in bodies under the idea of protecting yourselves. The law of the land ... will protect you far better than you can be protected by any force of your own'*.⁴⁶ Finally, the Committee implored the Defenders to *'abstain from all such parades and meetings and from every other measure that may tend to give alarm to your Protestant brethren'* because, it was bluntly explained to them, *'all riot, all tumult and disorder must throw embarrassment and difficulty in the way of our emancipation'* and provide any enemies with *'a pretext for delay'*.⁴⁷

The Catholic Committee's involvement in the local sectarian conflict between poor, rural Protestants and Catholics in Ulster demonstrated their rising importance. In lieu of appealing to Catholic clergy, the local Protestant officials sought the assistance of the Catholic Committee members, whose authority was considered superior and more likely to influence the behaviour of the Catholic Defenders. Moreover, by travelling out of Dublin and discovering the diverse experiences of Catholics throughout Ireland, the Catholic Committee gained an increased awareness and was better able to speak the true voice of Irish Catholics on a national level, combining regional concerns, such as sectarian conflict, with their greater aim of parliamentary repeal of penal restrictions. Although slightly different from the politics of the preceding several months, the support expressed by the Catholic Committee in their letter to the Catholic Defenders showed that the Committee was equally suited to the roles of moderator and advocate in purely local conflicts in which certain Irish

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Catholics were the victims of violent sectarian persecution. These activities, however, were only a brief distraction, as opposed to a prolonged diversion, from the primary goals of the Catholic Committee in 1792, which were enfranchisement and equal participation on juries.

During the month of July, although Keogh and Tone participated in the celebrations for Bastille Day and intervened between the Defenders and Peep-O'-Day Boys in Ulster, they never completely neglected the Committee's mission to raise support for the plan for elections. On their return trip to Dublin on 19 July, the Catholic Committee representatives met with Catholic bishops at Newry, Downpatrick, and Drogheda to secure their support for the scheme and to convince them of its necessity. Surviving correspondence between Keogh and the new Archbishop of Cashel, Thomas Bray, on 4 August reveals the activist's persuasive attempt at ensuring the clergy's participation in the scheme. Keogh pointed out to the clergyman:

a union of efforts and sentiments in our clergy and laity, so essential to our happiness, will naturally increase that affectionate and respectful attachment which have and will ever work the conduct of the laity of Ireland to their church and its pastors.⁴⁸

Similar evidence contained in the diary of rural farmer, James Scully, suggests that at some time during the months of June or July 1792 Keogh also travelled to County Tipperary, where 'he waited on the Munster bishops in Tipperary and got their aid to support the measures of the Catholic Committee in future'.⁴⁹ Finally, after conducting Committee business and holding meetings in Dublin at the end of July, the two activists made a return journey to Belfast on 7 August, which enabled them to stop in

⁴⁸ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 146.

⁴⁹ National Library of Ireland, *Diary of James Scully*, MS 27, 571 ['1792: June/July'].

Drogheda to dine with leading Catholic clergymen, including Dr. Patrick Joseph Plunkett, Primate Bishop of Meath and Hugh O'Reilly, bishop of Clogher.

Keogh and Tone remained in Ulster for nearly a fortnight, returning to Dublin around 20 August. On this extended, two-week trip, the activists met with important gentlemen, including Lord Moira and Lord Downshire. They also solidified alliances with pro-Catholic Dissenters and provincial Catholics, discussed political stratagems for the forthcoming months, and continued to speak in support of the Catholic cause. In the town of Newry, Tone and Keogh were encouraged to reconcile contending parties of local Catholics. Tone described a persuasive speech given by Keogh at an evening gathering in Newry's Crown Tavern as 'a very lucid statement of the Catholic affairs; ... [Keogh] preaches up peace and union and advises them to direct their animosities against the common enemy, the monopolists of the country. The whole company agree to bury all past feuds in oblivion, rise and shake hands mutually'.⁵⁰

These descriptions, contained in Tone's diary, demonstrate the ongoing efforts by Keogh and the Catholic Committee to secure political alliances throughout Ireland by catering to a wide range of Irish interests. By exercising their new found authority and working to create peace among the Catholics of Ulster, Keogh and Tone sought 'to induce the Catholics to desist from any step which might lead to tumult or disturbance'.⁵¹ Similarly, the Catholic Committee welcomed certain Dissenting communities of Ulster, who were recognised as supporters and firm friends to the Catholic cause. Despite encountering some conservative objections among the Protestant gentry, therefore, the trip was considered a success by Tone, who enthusiastically claimed:

⁵⁰ T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell & C. J. Woods (eds.), *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-1798*, i, 250 [18 August 1792 – 8:00pm, in Newry].

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, i, 254 [23 August 1792, 'To the editor of the Belfast Newsletter'].

We have put our adversaries in the north completely in the wrong and of course ourselves in the right. We have materially contributed to restore peace in the County Down. We have created a spirit in Newry which never existed there before. We have reconciled their differences. We have generally encouraged our friends, disheartened our enemies and puzzled Lord Hillsborough! ⁵²

Valuable political allies were similarly cultivated by the Catholic Committee in Dublin. Their strongest and most consistent supporters during the summer of 1792 were pro-Catholic Irish Whigs, including Henry Grattan, John Forbes and John Hutchinson. T. W. Tone's diary showed that a minimum of five meetings were held between Grattan and Catholic Committee representatives during the months of July and August 1792. These interviews, which took place whenever time permitted, involved the Irish Whigs giving the Committee political guidance, offering strategic advice, and even suggesting alterations to printed materials, including the Committee's July address to the Catholic Defenders. The Whigs' shift in tactics occurred after the Irish parliamentary session of 1792, when they had offered the Catholic Committee assistance in preparing and presenting a petition following the failure of Richard Burke's unconventional approach. D. Kennedy has explained that as an opposition party, 'the Whig leaders realised that their party's fortunes were now dependent on the success of the Catholic Committee as the Irish administration had secured the support of the Protestant ascendancy party'. ⁵³ In addition to the Irish Whigs needing Catholic support to counterbalance the union between the Irish administration and the Protestant ascendancy, the liberal Irish Whigs saw the logic in aiding a cause that, ultimately, would help them to achieve their own primary aim of parliamentary reform: 'the Whigs considered that the restoration of the people to the Constitution was a necessary

⁵² Ibid., i, 252 [20 August 1792].

⁵³ D. Kennedy, 'The Irish Whigs, 1789-1793' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1971), p. 189.

corollary to their other major policy of the restoration of the commons to the people'.⁵⁴ Even Tone concurred with this view by deciding in late August that 'Grattan considers the Catholic question but as a means of advancing the general good'.⁵⁵ This alliance between the Irish opposition party and the Catholic Committee, which was solidified by the summer of 1792, provided the Committee with the extremely important resource of sound, reliable guidance by experienced and respected Irish politicians. Consequently, the Irish Whigs played a very great role in helping to determine Catholic political strategy throughout the remainder of the year and, in particular, plans for the creation of a Catholic convention.

The May circular containing the Committee's new plan for elections had emphasised the importance of creating a more representative committee. It also made very brief and general references to 'collecting, occasionally, a number of country gentlemen in Dublin' on 'important occasions'.⁵⁶ These vague proposals, however, were more thoroughly developed and given shape by the Irish Whigs at a meeting at John Forbes's home, in early 1792, at which Grattan, Hutchinson, Ponsonby, Keogh and Byrne were all present. The Whigs suggested that the Catholic Committee summon the numerous, newly elected country delegates from throughout the kingdom to a great Catholic assembly in Dublin to be held in full public view. A description of this important meeting was contained in volume four of the *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, where it explained that, while Grattan considered the plan 'advisable and strongly recommended it', the Catholics present:

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 199.

⁵⁵ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 179 [27 August 1792].

⁵⁶ *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, Edward Byrne, Esq. in the Chair, Resolved - That the Following Letter be Circulated on May 26, 1792 (Dublin, 1792) [single sheet only]* or William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i., appendix II, 439-444.

were frightened at the proposed measure and would hardly attempt it. Hutchinson was very bold; Forbes was decided; Keogh was timid. The party had some trouble in persuading them to come forward; but the opinion of the meeting was so strong in favour of holding a convention that at length the Catholics were brought to agree to it.⁵⁷

This bold new tactic, which had never before been considered by any popular Catholic organisation, naturally took the Catholic Committee members by surprise and seemed an implausible recommendation. Ultimately, however, with the strong support and encouragement of their more seasoned allies in the Irish Whig party, the Committee consented and adopted the plan for a Catholic convention to be convened in Dublin. Although the exact date of the meeting at Forbes's home was unspecified, a reference contained in Tone's diary to a conversation held in Belfast between Tone and a Northern ally suggests that, before 7 August 1792, the scheme had been expounded. On 16 August Tone was advised that 'the new committee should not meet so early as October', so that Ulster support would have time to grow and, also, so that the country members could be assembled before the parliamentary session of 1793.⁵⁸

This would indicate that, although no clear mention of a Catholic convention was contained in either the May circular or the Catholic Committee Minute Book entries for 28 June, 25 July, or 30 July, the important meeting at Forbes' lodging occurred between the months of May and July 1792. At the end of August another meeting was held with Grattan at which Tone proposed the wise suggestion to adjourn this Catholic assembly before the opening of parliament, an idea which was 'eagerly adopted'.⁵⁹ Several reasons were provided to justify this tactic, one of which implied that, by the end of the summer the plan for a public Catholic convention had been firmly entrenched among the activists:

⁵⁷ Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 70.

⁵⁸ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 173 [Mr. Simms's advice].

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

It will remove the Chancellor's imputation of a Popish Congress sitting in the capital to overawe Parliament and so put the friends to the cause in the House of Commons on strong ground and, of course, cripple their adversaries.⁶⁰

The new necessity for receiving country delegates, not merely for an invigorated Catholic Committee but also for a great Catholic convention, placed additional pressure on the sub-committee to promote its plan for national elections. By 3 August, Tone was able to report that eight counties had transmitted the results of their regional elections to the sub-committee in Dublin, including Wexford, Down and possibly Sligo. Within one month several more counties followed, although historical accounts differ slightly as to the exact number. At a meeting of the Society of United Irishmen on 28 September 1792, the statement was made that '22 counties have already returned lists of their delegates to the Popish convention. The selection for the county of Dublin took place last Friday'.⁶¹ On 23 September, a more precise correspondent told Lord Grenville at Westminster that, 'every information I receive shows that the proceedings of the Catholics are very systematic. The delegates are chosen in the counties of Clare, Longford, and Westmeath ... and I believe in every other county.'⁶² The most reliable eyewitnesses, however, were John Keogh and T. W. Tone. Tone wrote in his diary on 1 October, '18 Counties have completed return of delegates and 9 more are in progress besides towns'.⁶³ While Keogh told Reverend Hussey, in a letter dated 2 October, 'already 18 counties have actually chosen their delegates besides Cork, Galway, Limerick and Cashel, other counties and towns are in a state of

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/10.

⁶² HMC, Fortescue MSS (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, ii, 318 [Buckingham to Grenville].

⁶³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 188.

progress'.⁶⁴ By the autumn of 1792 the majority of Irish towns and counties had finalised their election proceedings and had submitted the names of their elected delegates.

One striking exception to this regular pattern, however, emerged in the Connaught counties of Galway and Mayo, which were widely considered and eloquently described by Tone to be 'the two great Catholic counties in Ireland and the cream and flower of the Catholic gentry'.⁶⁵ The sub-committee in Dublin was informed in early October by Myles Keon that local Catholic patrons in Connaught were seeking to challenge the authority and plan of the Catholic Committee and to act separately by writing and transmitting their own Catholic petition. This intelligence prompted Tone and sub-committee member Thomas Braughall to depart immediately for Connaught, travelling out of Dublin at 8pm on the evening of 5 October 1792. Tone described his travelling companion as being slightly older than many of the other sub-committee members, a 65-year-old who had been left slightly lame after a fall off a horse at a review years earlier. Despite any shortcomings, however, Tone also described this activist as possessing 'courage' and a 'good heart'. Similar to many of the other sub-committee members, Braughall was a prosperous, wholesale merchant who operated out of Dublin.⁶⁶ According to Tone's diary the two men had a run-in with would-be robbers by the gate of Phoenix Park while leaving Dublin, later passing through Athlone to meet Dr. French, the Catholic Bishop of Elphin, and finally arriving in Mayo by 7 October. Tone's diary indicates that while the delegates for County Mayo were agreed upon by 7 October, the following day the Catholic gentlemen of Galway presented a greater obstacle.

⁶⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [Keogh to Rev. Hussey, 2 October 1792].

⁶⁵ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 193.

⁶⁶ J. W. Hammond, 'Thomas Braughall, 1729-1803 Catholic Emancipationist', *Dublin Historical Record*, 14 (1956), 41-49.

These gentlemen, who were strongly influenced by rival Catholic leader, Denis Browne, held a meeting to raise two objections: that Lord Fingall's approval as expressed in the May circular 'arises from misconception or wilful misstatement' and that the Catholic Committee had assumed a new and unjust power in expelling 'refractory members'.⁶⁷ Tone responded to these concerns by disproving the accusations with letters and testimonials and then reassured the Galway Catholics that 'the Committee has no power to expel, but constituents have power to revoke their delegation'.⁶⁸ The immediate results of this persuasive discourse were that the Catholic gentlemen of Connaught were able to expose Denis Browne as a man 'endeavouring to become the Padrone of the Mayo Catholics and establish, thereby, a strong interest in the county'.⁶⁹ Several days later, on 20 October, the Galway Catholics selected delegates for the Catholic Convention, which included the outspoken chairman of the 8 October Galway meeting, Sir Thomas French. Before returning to Dublin on the tenth, Tone was able to write confidently in his diary:

[Galway and Mayo] have been, hitherto, rather adverse to the General Committee from the bad spirit of aristocracy which has done the cause so much mischief by producing disunion, but we trust we have now fairly beat the [Dublin] Castle out of Galway and are pretty confident we have done the same in Mayo.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 192 [October 8].

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 193.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 193.

II

The Resolutions of the County Grand Juries

In addition to the attempts at obstructing the Catholic Committee's plan for elections which were orchestrated by rival provincial Catholics, the plan met with the tremendous and vociferous condemnation of Protestant-led Grand Juries throughout Ireland. On 2 August 1792, Lord Lieutenant Westmorland transmitted to Secretary Dundas a copy of the resolutions passed by the Londonderry Grand Jury with a brief note speculating that 'there is an apparent probability that this may be followed by similar resolutions of many Grand Juries of this kingdom'.⁷¹ This prediction was thoroughly accurate, as more than fifteen Irish Grand Juries and town corporations followed this example, passing strongly worded resolutions which disparaged the Catholic Committee and its nationwide attempt at securing delegates to a representative Catholic convention in Dublin.

In T. W. Tone's diary several examples of these resolutions are preserved. Statements made by the Grand Jury of Londonderry, at the summer assizes held on 30 July 1792, included a refusal to recognise the sub-committee of the Catholics of Ireland and expressed the opinion that 'the meetings and delegations recommended ... would tend to produce discontent and disorder'.⁷² The Catholic Committee must have been even more shocked to learn that the Londonderry Grand Jury was determined to resist and fight the Catholic plan for elections:

⁷¹ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3].

⁷² William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 377-8.

The system of union between the clergy and laity ... insidiously conveys the idea of an hierarchy, which would eventually destroy the Protestant ascendancy, the freedom of elective franchise and the established Constitution of the country and that we are determined to support with our lives and fortunes that happy constitution as established at the Revolution of 1688 and to maintain the Protestant ascendancy in this kingdom.⁷³

This sentiment was echoed by the numerous other county Grand Juries, corporations and freeholders, who published resolutions expressing opposition to the plan of the Catholic Committee in the summer of 1792. Tone's diary records the Grand Jury of Cork as describing the Catholic scheme as 'an unconstitutional proceeding of the most alarming, dangerous and seditious tendency; an attempt to overawe Parliament'.⁷⁴ Similarly, County Roscommon compared the intended Catholic convention to 'the National Assembly of France, which has already plunged that devoted country into a state of anarchy and tumult unexampled in any civilized nation'.⁷⁵ County Kerry's freeholders considered the scheme for a Catholic convention 'as calculated to continue and preserve separate views and interests between Protestants and Catholics, which we trusted time would gradually efface ... and above all to establish a dangerous innovation subversive of our present Constitution'.⁷⁶ The counties of Leitrim, Sligo, Donegal and Fermanagh all swore their devotion to 'the Protestant interest of Ireland and the present Constitution in church and state', to which they expressed their willingness 'to defend and protect with our lives and fortunes and to hand down to our posterity unaltered and unimpaired'.⁷⁷

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 419.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Francis Plowden, *An Historical Review of the State of Ireland* (London, 1813), p. 198 ['County Kerry Meeting, At a Meeting of the Freeholders of the County of Kerry'].

⁷⁷ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 419 & National Library of Ireland, O'Hara Papers, MS 36, 393/3 ['Sligo Grand Jury Room – Summer Assizes 1792'].

Finally, at their summer assizes, the Grand Jury of Louth bluntly proclaimed around late August or early September:

Allowing to the Roman Catholics the right of voting for members to serve in Parliament or admitting them to any participation in the government of the Kingdom is incompatible with the safety of the Protestant establishment, the continuance of the succession to the crown in the illustrious House of Hanover and must finally tend to shake, if not destroy our connection with Great Britain.⁷⁸

All of these Grand Jury resolutions expressed a common fear of the Committee's plan for elections and for a Catholic convention, which they asserted would constitute an illegal assembly intent on overawing the Irish Parliament. Moreover, the county Grand Juries demonstrated their defensive stance intent on preserving the status quo and Protestant ascendancy of Ireland in the face of strong Catholic activism. By offering to risk their lives and fortunes to preserve the Protestant Ascendancy as established by the Glorious Revolution of the seventeenth century, the Protestant-led Grand Juries alluded to an expected outbreak of violent hostility by the Catholics, a presumption which was never reflected or implied in any Catholic Committee statement or publication.

The opinions displayed by the County Grand Juries may not have been shared by all of the Protestants of Ireland, but they were representative of a certain segment of the Irish public. A. P. W. Malcomson has stated that 'the Grand Jury of any county – even though there was doubt about the constitutional propriety of its passing resolutions on political subjects – was still the body most fairly representative of the landed property of the county'.⁷⁹ These extremely conservative, anti-Catholic sentiments, therefore, may have been widespread among the Protestant landed gentry

⁷⁸ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 420-1.

⁷⁹ A. P. W. Malcomson, *John Foster: The Politics of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 230-1.

of Ireland, who controlled the county Grand Juries and constituted the bulk of the active Protestant Ascendancy.

As these public declarations poured into Dublin from throughout the kingdom, horrified members of the Irish Catholic Committee decided to formulate a response. Tone's Diary indicates that the sub-committee had initially drafted a manifesto at the end of August, which repudiated the resolutions of the Freeholders of Limerick. These statements were especially insulting because they cited Edward Byrne's name and they employed unusually harsh words, claiming that the Catholic Committee sought 'to erect a Popish democracy for their government and direction in pursuit of whatever objects may be held out to them by turbulent and seditious men'.⁸⁰ Following advice from Henry Grattan, who called this manifesto 'too controversial',⁸¹ at a meeting on 27 August, however, the sub-committee amended their response. Also, one week later, on 6 September, Tone attended a meeting with two independent legal councillors, Beresford Burston and the Honourable Simon Butler. These legal experts were hired for ten guineas each and were given the task of evaluating the Grand Juries' charges that the Committee's May circular and national plan for elections had been 'illegal and unconstitutional' and then hopefully to 'demonstrate that the Committee have taken no step whatsoever, which the laws and Constitution do not fully warrant'.⁸² Their important and supportive findings, which were reported to Tone and Byrne on 13 September, were discussed at a meeting of the sub-committee that same afternoon and were later published in order to discredit the statements made by the county Grand Juries.

⁸⁰ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 420-1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, i, 177.

⁸² *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics, Randal McDonnell, Esq. in the Chair... Relating to a Circular Issued by the Sub-Committee "Erroneously Stated to be Illegal and Unconstitutional" ... Sept 13, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

These legal councillors were given five specific queries to consider. These questions asked whether the Catholic Committee had the right to petition for a redress of grievances; if the Committee could lawfully choose delegates for the purpose of drafting a petition; and whether the meetings held for the purpose of choosing these delegates constituted unlawful assemblies. Finally, the Catholic Committee enquired into the legal mode of presenting petitions to parliament and the crown, and asked whether their overall plan for elections was legal. Without any disagreement, both councillors replied to all five queries in the affirmative, asserting that the Catholic Committee had not taken any illegal or unconstitutional action. Beresford Burston stated, 'in presenting the petition to his majesty, which may be either to himself in person or through the medium of the Lord Lieutenant, it would, I think, be prudent ... that not more than ten persons should present it'.⁸³ Similarly, Simon Butler boldly asserted:

I am also clearly and decidedly of opinion, that the plan [for elections] is in every respect agreeable to law, and that persons peaceably carrying or attempting to carry the same into effect, would *not* thereby incur *any penalty whatsoever*. The plan is, indeed, unexceptionable; while it serves effectually to obtain the general sense of the great Catholic body of Ireland, it provides every precaution against tumult and disturbance.⁸⁴

According to Tone's diary, these legal pronouncements, which were printed in newspapers and distributed in handbills, were quite successful in reassuring concerned members of the Catholic clergy and combating public opposition to the Catholic Committee's plan for elections.

The Catholic Committee and provincial Catholic groups throughout Ireland did not stop with this September publication, however. Tone's diary proves that, by mid-

⁸³ *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics, Randal McDonnell, Esq. in the Chair... Relating to a Circular Issued by the Sub-Committee "Erroneously Stated to be Illegal and Unconstitutional" ... Sept 13, 1792 (Dublin, 1792), p. 8.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

October, the Committee was in the process of preparing its own thorough, carefully considered reply to the County Grand Juries. In the comparatively brief *Vindication of the Circular of the Catholic Sub-Committee in Reply to the Resolutions of the Grand Juries*, which appeared in the autumn of 1792, the Committee proudly reaffirmed 'the justice of our cause' and its intent 'to persist in their endeavours ... by any means not expressly forbidden by law'.⁸⁵ This pamphlet contained the Committee's semi-apologetic statement addressed to the Protestants of Ireland:

If our endeavours constitutionally to obtain these two great objects have given offence to any among our Protestant brethren; we most sincerely and heartily regret it, but we cannot in justice to ourselves or to our children, desist from claims founded in the very first principle, not only of universal equality, but more particularly of that Constitution ...⁸⁶

Also, after answering the various charges of the Grand Juries, the publication closed with the explanatory claim that 'power is not our object, it is protection, not power, that we desire, the means of defending the Catholic peasantry of Ireland from tyranny and oppression'.⁸⁷

This brief pamphlet was later followed by the far longer and more elaborate publication, *A Vindication of the Conduct and Principles of the Catholics of Ireland, from the Charges Made against Them, by Certain Grand Juries, and other Interested Bodies in that Country*, on 3 December 1792. This publication alluded to the existence of a 'few monopolists, whose power and pre-eminence exist by [the people's] slavery' and then boldly asserted that 'their dishonest artifice will not avail'.⁸⁸ It also went into greater detail by including a general account of the events of 1791 and 1792 and

⁸⁵ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 406.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, i, 406-7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, i, 409.

⁸⁸ *A Vindication of the Conduct and Principles of the Catholics of Ireland, from the Charges Made Against Them, by Certain Grand Juries, and Other Interested Bodies in that Country; with an appendix ... on Dec 3, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 24.

providing specific information about certain Grand Jury resolutions. In particular Leitrim, Cork, Louth and Limerick were cited because of the presence of certain individuals on their Grand Juries. The Committee explained that 'a very great majority of the leading figures affixed to those resolutions are those of men either high in the government of this country or enjoying very lucrative places under that government or possessing extensive borough interest'.⁸⁹ It was observed that John Foster, the Speaker of the Irish House of Commons, sat at the head of the Grand Jury of Louth and that the first signatory to the resolutions of the Grand Jury of Leitrim was the appointed Collector of the Port of Dublin. Furthermore, the meeting at County Limerick, which had included the pronouncement of particularly insulting resolutions, had been 'dignified by the presence of no less a personage than the Lord High Chancellor of Ireland'.⁹⁰

The Catholic Committee was essentially asserting that the Grand Juries were not accurate representatives of public opinion in Ireland, but were instead being controlled and manipulated by, and were serving as mere extensions of, the Irish administration at Dublin Castle. This claim, which was strongly reminiscent of Richard Burke's accusations from the preceding winter, clearly called the independence of the Grand Juries into question. It also suggested that the Protestant landowners of the kingdom were not necessarily anti-Catholic, but that a corrupt and powerful faction within the Irish administration had exerted its own influence to oppose the Catholic cause through the medium of the county Grand Juries.

Provincial Catholic groups, who shared this belief with the Catholic Committee, also became involved in the war of words with the Grand Juries. Two of the first counties to hold meetings and publish statements were Sligo and Waterford on 1

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

September and 22 September respectively. The Catholics of County Sligo upheld their legal right to petition parliament for a repeal of the laws depriving them of the elective franchise and to use all legal methods available to them, 'since the Catholics of Ireland have no immediate connection with the legislature of this country ... they must necessarily resort to such means as the laws allow'.⁹¹ They also defended the Catholic Committee in Dublin by insisting 'in all the communications which we have had with either the general or sub-committee of the Catholics of Ireland, they have evinced no disposition to excite animosity or produce insubordination' and simultaneously declaring to all of Ireland 'the great principles of the Constitution are violated ... since as Catholics we are taxed though not represented and bound by laws to which we have not given consent'.⁹²

Similar sentiments were expressed in *A Declaration of Political Sentiments Published by the Roman Catholics of the City and Vicinity of Waterford in Answer to the Resolutions Entered into by the Different Grand Juries at the Summer Assizes, 1792*. This publication responded to the Grand Juries accusation of 'a [Catholic] design to overawe and to intimidate' by calmly observing that in Waterford 'a perfectly amicable intercourse has long subsisted between the members of the different religious persuasions' and that the recent alarmist public accusations 'are likely to affect our credit as a commercial and our reputation as an enlightened people'.⁹³ The Waterford Catholics also defended their lawful attempts to gain the elective franchise by explaining, 'we seek no indefinite rights. We promulgate no untried system and we

⁹¹ National Library of Ireland, O'Hara Papers, MS 36, 393/3 [*'Sligo Catholic Meeting – September 1, 1792'*].

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/34/68 [*'A Declaration of Political Sentiments Published by the Roman Catholics of the City and Vicinity of Waterford in Answer to the Resolutions Entered into by the Different Grand Juries at the Summer Assizes, 1792'*].

only pray to be re-instated in that condition, which at the revolution was guaranteed to our ancestors.’⁹⁴

In the following month of October, several other provincial Catholics, including Irish Catholic groups in Tipperary, Limerick, Down, Galway, and Cork, followed the two outspoken examples of Sligo and Waterford. The Tipperary Catholic declaration was signed by 57 people on 2 October, while the Limerick Catholics echoed Sligo by stating ‘we are taxed without being represented’.⁹⁵ The Catholics of County Down asked, ‘has not a century of suffering washed away or expiated our offences and must a great gulph lie forever between us and our country?’⁹⁶ Resolutions from the Freeholders of County Cork were ‘highly approving of the conduct of the Catholic Committee’⁹⁷ and at the general meeting of the Roman Catholics of the County and City of Cork on 15 October, they defended their actions, upheld their loyalty and used strong words to describe their opponents’ treachery:

[They] have diffused vague conjectures through Ireland and foreign countries; interrupting at home the public tranquillity and the harmony of social life, representing us abroad in a condition of precarious settlement ... We see the spirit of intolerance observable in these proceedings with astonishment in an age which is denominated enlightened.⁹⁸

Finally, the Roman Catholics of Galway concurred with the sentiments of the Waterford Catholics on 14 October in a declaration, which was signed by nearly 400 gentlemen, recommending that a cordial union of all Irishmen be established through the provision of equal political rights including the restoration of Irish Catholics to the

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Daire Keogh, *The French Disease, The Catholic Church and Irish Radicalism 1790-1800*, p. 59.

⁹⁶ T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell & C. J. Woods (eds.), *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-1798*, i, 302 [5 October 1792, ‘Declaration of the Catholics of Country Down’].

⁹⁷ National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/101.

⁹⁸ *Declaration at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the County and City of Cork, Convened by Public Advertisement and Held at the Cork Tavern the 15th of October, 1792* (Cork, 1792), p. 2.

elective franchise. The Galway Catholics displayed the same determination as their provincial Catholic associates in condemning the alarmist and menacing 'misrepresentations and chimeras'⁹⁹ of the Grand Juries, while coyly warning them:

That whilst the authors of these crude conjectures expect an unlimited deference to their opinions, they should have treated with more decorum a body which contains the representatives of so many ancient families, a large portion of the landed and vast majority of the commercial interest of the county.¹⁰⁰

In addition to sparking a nationwide torrent of public declarations and statements by Catholic organisations throughout Ireland, the insulting resolutions of the provincial Grand Juries were credited with helping to arouse and renew the flagging interest in the Catholic Committee's plan for elections. In the *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, John Keogh is described as telling an associate in the summer of 1792 that 'he had failed – that the people would not stir – that there would be no public meetings – that he began to despair and that he could not excite them.'¹⁰¹ Shortly after the appearance of the Grand Jury resolutions, however, he reportedly said to Grattan, 'By God! [The Lord High Chancellor] Lord Clare has done what I so long attempted and attempted in vain. He has roused the Catholics'.¹⁰² This phenomenon was demonstrated in counties such as Tipperary, where the local Catholics met at Thurles to issue a response to the Grand Juries and, simultaneously, to select three delegates for the Catholic Convention.¹⁰³ In County Limerick, John

⁹⁹ Francis Plowden, *An Historical Review of the State of Ireland* (London, 1813), p. 196 ['Galway Roman Catholics at a Numerous and Respectable Meeting of the Roman Catholic Inhabitants of the Town and County of Galway, October 14, 1792'].

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 82.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ T. P. Power, *Land Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary*, p. 293 or The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [John Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792]. There is a slight discrepancy between these two sources as Power states the election occurred on 2 October, while Keogh suggests 3 October.

Keogh witnessed a simultaneous election and public reply to the Grand Juries in late September:

In Limerick the power of the Chancellor is nearly absolute, yet neither his power nor Lord Perry's could withhold the Catholics there. They had a most respectable meeting, chose delegates, were very complimentary ... Having finished I parted Limerick last Wednesday. I refer you to the prints for their resolutions or declaration. They will appear in a few days.¹⁰⁴

Despite their obvious intention to obstruct the impending Catholic Convention in Dublin, therefore, the county Grand Juries ultimately contributed to its successful formation by adopting aggressive and hostile tactics, which drove a greater number of provincial Irish Catholics to join with the Irish Catholic Committee. They became more active in the Catholic cause and sought a restoration of their rights through political means. Theobald McKenna accurately depicted these events by observing that the Grand Juries had 'scattered the enthusiasm of emancipation through every county of the kingdom; if they had been silent it would probably have been confined to Dublin'.¹⁰⁵

This tense atmosphere, which came to pervade much of Ireland by the autumn of 1792, affected the Protestant allies of the Catholic Committee as well. In Belfast, at a meeting of the radical Society of United Irishmen on 5 October with Archibald H. Rowan as chairman, resolutions were passed 'applauding the tenor of Edward Byrne's letter'.¹⁰⁶ While, closer to Dublin, Henry Grattan announced his late summer decision to confine future communications between the Irish Whigs and the Catholic Committee

¹⁰⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38275 [Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792].

¹⁰⁵ Theobald McKenna, *Address to the Roman Catholics of Ireland Relative to the Proceedings During the Summer of 1792 and on the Means and Practicability of a Tranquil Emancipation* (Dublin, October 1792), p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/102.

exclusively to the person of T. W. Tone. Tone explained Grattan's reasons for this tactical manoeuvre:

If they were to hold personal communications, government would say they were agitators, inflaming the public mind and that instead of their being the organ of Catholic sentiments, the Catholics were only instruments in their hands; that the grievances of the Catholics would thereby be said not to be felt, but suggested by Grattan and his friends to answer the purposes of a faction.¹⁰⁷

Similarly, D. Kennedy has observed that the Irish Whigs believed that if their secret involvement in the Catholic convention had been made public it would damage the Catholic cause, calling into question the validity of the representative assembly and stigmatising the event as an 'opposition plot'.¹⁰⁸ Finally, despite his failure to provide the Irish Catholic Committee with reliable assistance or information from Westminster since his departure from Dublin in March, Richard Burke insisted on making a return voyage to Ireland to assist the Committee in the autumn months.

Richard Burke had attempted to hold meetings with British ministers at Westminster on the subject of Catholic relief throughout the summer of 1792. The ministers, however, repeatedly rebuffed his advances, consistently telling him that they were '[reduced] to the necessity of declining the honour of an interview with you on any business, you as agent to the Catholics of Ireland'.¹⁰⁹ In Dublin, the Catholic Committee came to appreciate the futility of continuing to employ a London agent after the British ministers had begun to insist on referring the matter solely to the discretion of the Irish administration in the Castle. Accordingly, on behalf of the Catholic Committee, Tone informed Burke in June 1792, that his help would no longer be

¹⁰⁷ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 178-9.

¹⁰⁸ D. Kennedy, 'The Irish Whigs, 1789-1793' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1971), p. 195.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas H. D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 195 [Dundas to Richard Burke, 1 August 1792].

necessary: 'the determination of ministers in England is such as to render all further applications to them useless'.¹¹⁰ This general instruction, however, failed to dissuade Burke from continuing his activity and, ultimately, he sought a more hands-on involvement by returning to Ireland in September. Tone mentioned his attempts at dissuading Richard Burke from making this trip through three or four pieces of correspondence which sought 'to politely convince him not to return'.¹¹¹ Also, John Keogh wrote in great detail about Burke's unwelcome return to Ireland:

He pressed beyond all the usual rules that we should agree to his coming over on our affairs. Very many and very powerful reasons obliged us to decline ... He came over on his own private affairs as it were and attacked me without mercy or delicacy to engage me to try to reinstate him and that he should act for our affairs here during parliament though, in truth, we had no business to use him in.¹¹²

Richard Burke arrived in Dublin on 3 September, where he stayed for approximately a fortnight. He observed the democratic changes which had taken place over the summer, including the plan for elected county delegates to participate in the Catholic convention. Burke also informed his father that some committee members treated him 'with a little jealousy as too much attached to the cause of that government by which they are so ill treated' and that the Irish Catholics had grown desperate seeing hope only in 'popular causes'.¹¹³ Most of Richard Burke's autumn visit to Ireland was not spent in Dublin, however; it was spent in County Cork and the Southern counties.

Keogh's letter of 2 October placed Burke in Cork at the start of the month as he specifically stated, 'Mr. R. Burke was here, is now in Cork, not on our affairs'.¹¹⁴ Burke described his visit to Cork as 'encouraging' telling his father that 'there are

¹¹⁰ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 210-11.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, i, 64.

¹¹² The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792].

¹¹³ Thomas H. D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, pp. 199-200.

¹¹⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792].

engagements and invitations without end. I thought it not amiss ... to receive the honours here partly in your name, partly in my own'.¹¹⁵ Surviving correspondence from Richard Burke shows that he remained in the southern counties for over a fortnight, writing from Killarney on 14 October and attending a reception given in his honour at the Bush Tavern in Cork on 16 October. One eyewitness of this Cork dinner later provided a colourful description of events: 'Mr. R. Burke rose and as soon as the enthusiasm of the meeting subsided, simply said, "on the part of my father and myself, I respectfully thank you". The effect of this laconic address cannot be easily described.'¹¹⁶ It was likely that Burke was also present at the general meeting of the Roman Catholics of Cork on 15 October, where important declarations were made in defence of the Catholic cause. On his visit to Killarney, Richard Burke sought the opportunity to visit the domicile of the Earl of Kenmare, but with little success:

[Kenmare] the great man of this place, I understand after great deliberation, determined to show us no civility. In truth he is a poor, little creature, though as men are mixed characters his style of proceeding in the management and decoration of his estate is clever.¹¹⁷

The most significant contribution to the Catholic cause made by Richard Burke in the autumn of 1792, however, was the production of a pamphlet entitled, *A Letter from Richard Burke, Esq. to ***** Esq. of Cork in Which the Legality and Propriety of the Meeting Recommended in Mr. Byrne's Circular Letter are Discussed*, wherein the author staunchly defended the Catholic Committee's plan for a convention of elected delegates and, at the same time, strongly condemned the statements of the Grand Juries. Burke called the former 'legal', claiming the primary advantage of a Catholic

¹¹⁵ Thomas H. D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 200.

¹¹⁶ Marshall, P. J. and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, p. xviii [R. Therry to G. Canning, 1827].

¹¹⁷ Thomas H. D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 210 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke from Killarney, 14 October 1792].

convention would be to 'enable men more effectively to discover and to do away with the misrepresentation and to efface the false colours and glasses which the adversary ... never fails to throw upon each event as it arises'.¹¹⁸ In describing the Grand Jury resolutions, Burke once again alluded to government corruption, stating: 'They have thought fit ... to ring the tocsin and to proclaim through the mouths of twenty grand juries, and as many corporations, that a committee (which they knew to be legal and innocent) was an attack upon parliament and a subversion of the constitution'.¹¹⁹ Despite the Catholic Committee's lack of interest in him at the end of 1792, Richard Burke did continue to defend the Committee's schemes, support the Irish Catholic cause, and speak out against the interference of the Irish administration, during his stay in Ireland between September and November 1792.

These Irish officials were equally convinced of Burke's influence in Ireland. Chief Secretary Hobart wrote to Henry Dundas on 4 October 1792: 'the Catholics appear to have acquired fresh vigour since the arrival of Mr. R. Burke, who continues to encourage them with the expectations of British neutrality'.¹²⁰ Hobart also acknowledged the revived interest in the plan for elections which occurred in October: 'The scheme of their congress, which at one time I had the strongest reason to believe had been extinguished, is again resumed and delegates have been chosen in most parts of the country'.¹²¹ Although this renewed activity occurred largely as a result of the Grand Jury resolutions, Hobart seemed to attribute it primarily to the efforts of the sub-committee: 'the most violent of the Roman Catholic Committee travelled through the country to spirit up and encourage the Roman Catholics to carry their plan of

¹¹⁸ Richard Burke, *A Letter from Richard Burke, Esq. to ***** Esq. of Cork in Which the Legality and Propriety of the Meeting Recommended in Mr. Byrne's Circular Letter are Discussed* (Cork, 1792), p. 2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹²⁰ National Library of Ireland, Dundas MS 54 ['private'].

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

representation into effect'.¹²² Hobart also accused John Keogh and certain members of the sub-committee of influencing and manipulating the Roman Catholic clergy: '[they] threatened them with inducing the Roman Catholic laity to withdraw that support from the clergy of their persuasion'.¹²³ He claimed that Keogh exercised great control over the Belfast Dissenters: 'he attended the Belfast meeting of the Parliamentary reformers, where he possesses influence enough to guide their publications'.¹²⁴ These inaccurate speculations suggest that in the autumn of 1792 the Irish administration in Dublin Castle had almost no direct contact with the Catholic Committee and were forced to observe Catholic activity from a distance, relying solely on eyewitness accounts and second-hand information.

Although most Catholic activists were involved in the schemes of the Catholic Committee at the end of 1792, some Irish Catholic parties were also consigned to the periphery of the movement. Despite the Catholic Committee's publication of May 1792, in which Lord Fingall had expressed his support for the plan for elections and had announced his reunion with the sub-committee, surviving summer correspondence suggests a disapproval of their activities. Letters written to Lord Fingall from his agent, Hugh Wilson, refer to 'the very extensive prejudice which every body agree the free and frequent use of your name in a certain late publication hath done you ... the business that done you infinite political mischief'.¹²⁵ Fingall's agent also cited the appearance of 'certain resolutions by certain Roman Catholics lately sent to the counties of Wexford and other counties for the signatures of the country Roman Catholics', which had 'given high offence to the higher power here and even created an

¹²² National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Evan Nepean, 8 October 1792].

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ National Library of Ireland, Fingall MSS 8021[18 August 1792].

alarm of a very serious nature'.¹²⁶ As a result of this political clamour, Wilson suggested to Fingall that he meet with the Lord Lieutenant to express his disapproval of this 'strange step'.¹²⁷ This advice highlighted the particular dilemma of certain members of the Irish Catholic aristocracy, which was well captured by Wilson:

I believe that a visit to the Viceroy on the subject would be proper especially by any Roman Catholic who means any application for favour or even for right for certainly no favour will be done or countenance shown to any by whom such resolutions will be countenanced.¹²⁸

Unlike the majority of the Irish Catholic Committee, therefore, certain members of the Catholic aristocracy still had a great deal to lose from offending the government. This included Lord Fingall, who was frequently involved in expensive legal proceedings and, as a result, had nearly no involvement in the Committee's autumn schemes.

Another body of extremely cautious Irish Catholics were the clerical leaders. Although many members of the Irish Catholic clergy were great supporters of the Catholic Committee, who relied on their assistance to hold elections and further political measures, surviving correspondence shows a combined concern and hesitation among several Irish bishops over the Committee's ambitious plan. In October, Keogh described these conservative clerical opinions as 'mistaking all attempts for liberty as some way connected with the robbers and murderers of France'.¹²⁹ This view was demonstrated by G. Teahan of Kerry, who wrote to Archbishop Troy on 5 October to cite 'the open and avowed attachment of the Committee to the cause of French anarchy and irreligion'.¹³⁰ The strongest indictment against the Roman Catholic clergy in 1792, however, was made by W. J. MacNeven in his retrospective, where he stated that

¹²⁶ Ibid., [11 August 1792].

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792].

¹³⁰ Daire Keogh, *The French Disease, The Catholic Church and Irish Radicalism 1790-1800*, p. 60.

the scheme for elections 'was at first very strongly opposed by the Catholic bishops ... they strenuously insisted to their flocks that the measure was not only impolitic but illegal and imminently dangerous to those who might try to carry it into effect'.¹³¹ He believed that it was only through the legal pronouncements of Beresford Burston and Simon Butler that these objections were ultimately eliminated.

MacNeven may have overlooked an important consideration, however, as many activists strongly advocated clerical silence. For example, certain Irish Whigs and Edmund Burke believed that the Roman Catholic clergy could undermine the movement through too much outspoken political activity. This policy of silent non-intervention was defended and described in a letter on 2 October 1792:

It was well judged ... not to have the signatures of the clergy to [*The Declaration of the Catholics of Waterford*]. The elective franchise is an object desirable primarily for the laity; we are supposed to be but little interested in it on our own account, and though we earnestly wish for their success in obtaining it, our active interference would be rather hurtful, I believe, than useful to promote the pursuit.¹³²

Many Irish Catholic bishops, therefore, demonstrated their support for the Catholic Committee and the Catholic cause not by assuming leadership roles, but through more secret encouragement. Ultimately, despite certain initial reservations, by the end of October 1792 most members of the Irish Catholic clergy were firmly behind the Catholic Committee's plan for elections, even if their support was neither public nor vocal. This enabled John Keogh to assert that, although the Catholic Committee

¹³¹ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of Their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, pp. 31-2.

¹³² P. O'Donoghue, 'The Catholic Church and Ireland in an Age of Revolution and Rebellion, 1782-1803' (unpublished PhD thesis, UCD, 1975), p. 180 [W. Egan to Thomas Hearn, 2 October 1792].

experienced some difficulties in obtaining clerical aid, 'yet some we obtained even from those [conservative clerics] and very active support from many others'.¹³³

An Irish Catholic activist who became an outspoken critic of the Catholic Committee by the autumn of 1792 was the former sub-committee member, Dr. Theobald McKenna. This rift was sufficiently public to be reported to the British ministers at Westminster. On 16 October Grenville was informed by a correspondent: 'I find they have dismissed Dr. McKenna from their confidence entirely. Keogh does not enter into particulars about it.'¹³⁴ This correspondent surmised that the split had arisen from an association that McKenna had formed with the northern Dissenters. This may not be accurate, however, as he had actually been steadily moving away from radical tactics throughout 1792, eventually adopting a comparatively conservative approach by 1793. Douglas Leighton has explained that McKenna's beliefs were diametrically opposed to those of the rest of the Irish Catholic Committee as he claimed that 'what was particularly required of Catholic leaders in the period leading up to the concessions of 1793 was a spirit of conciliation and patient perseverance'.¹³⁵ This reversal may have resulted from unexpected violence abroad¹³⁶ or in Ireland, where the actions of the Catholic Defenders may have suggested an increase in sectarian violence in the countryside. Leighton has also proposed that McKenna's experiences with the northern radicals were negative and had led him to dismiss their value to the Catholic cause, calling them 'pseudo-philanthropists, who support French liberty but have no compassion for Catholics'.¹³⁷ In a pamphlet published in October 1792, McKenna discussed the negative precedent of the French Revolution: 'her

¹³³ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792].

¹³⁴ *HMC, Fortescue MSS* (MSS of William Grenville), 13th Report, *Appendix III*, ii, 323 [J. B. Burges to Grenville, 16 October 1792].

¹³⁵ Douglas A. Leighton, 'Theobald McKenna and the Catholic Question' (unpublished MA thesis, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, 1985), p. 84.

¹³⁶ King Louis XVI was apprehended and held by the French revolutionaries in the summer of 1792.

¹³⁷ Douglas A. Leighton, 'Theobald McKenna and the Catholic Question', p. 87.

freedom tarnished with ferocity, and degenerating in the opinion of many persons, into licentiousness, rather deters moderate men from giving their sanction to popular proceedings'.¹³⁸ He then reiterated his opposition to violence and constitutional change while stressing the more immediate need for political caution and avoiding 'a propensity to overact the patriot character' as 'the circumstance of this country are now essentially altered'.¹³⁹

Although McKenna may have had legitimate concerns over certain Catholic Committee actions during the crucial closing months of 1792, he may also have become involved in a personal power struggle with other sub-committee members. McKenna drew attention to numerous flaws in the tactics of the Catholic Committee. He suggested that their measures appeared to have been 'conducted with a degree of superfluous bustle of which the tendency is not easily discernable'.¹⁴⁰ McKenna also criticised the Catholic Committee's judgement during the preceding winter by calling into question the proposed qualification for the Catholic franchise that had been 'most injudiciously selected and proves that the persons who undertook the management of this transaction did not understand it'.¹⁴¹ Moreover, in describing the overall approach that the Catholic Committee had adopted throughout 1792, he asserted that 'the repetition of resolutions, addresses, justifications, circular letters, etc. have given to the representative body of the Catholic people the air of a little squibbling club'.¹⁴² Finally, in his October pamphlet, McKenna publicly lambasted his associates in the

¹³⁸ Theobald McKenna, *Address to the Roman Catholics of Ireland Relative to the Late Proceedings, and on the Means and Practicability of a Tranquil Emancipation* (Dublin, 1792), p. 15.

¹³⁹ Theobald McKenna, *Political Essays Relative to the Affairs of Ireland, in 1791, 1792 and 1793* (London, 1794), p. 138.

¹⁴⁰ Theobald McKenna, *Address to the Roman Catholics of Ireland Relative to the Late Proceedings* (Dublin, 1792), p. 3.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁴² Theobald McKenna, *Political Essays Relative to the Affairs of Ireland, in 1791, 1792 and 1793* (London, 1794), p. 137.

Catholic Committee, withholding nothing in his strong denunciation of his former comrades and fellow activists in the Catholic cause:

I am obliged reluctantly to express what the entire nation must perceive, that the few gentlemen of the metropolis who have hitherto assumed the direction of this business stand in need of co-adjutors. I question their prudence, not their zeal, not their intentions, but their reflection, foresight and political sagacity ... For the last ten months [the Catholic cause] has fluctuated before the public in the hands of unskilful managers, without even the dignity of steadiness, advancing and retreating, asserting and retracting with the giddiness of schoolboys and as random as a game of nine-pins.¹⁴³

McKenna had certainly become convinced of the need for particular political caution by October 1792. After observing the unfortunate events in France he became more conservative, favouring traditional methods and mistrusting popular tactics. This does not, however, entirely account for his estrangement from the Catholic sub-committee which, despite seeming disorganised, never espoused violence or radicalism. Displaying an almost egotistical belief in his own superiority as an academic, McKenna later suggested that the leaders of the Catholic movement who had assumed high public profiles were 'eager to monopolize to themselves the honor of appearing in it' and that 'it surely was not wise to have committed the entire detail and management to mere country gentlemen and mere merchants'.¹⁴⁴ McKenna, as a man of learning, therefore, thought that he would have made a more suitable Catholic leader than the mere merchants and gentlemen who constituted the sub-committee and who were responsible for his being excluded from his influential position. T. W. Tone has provided a plausible reason for this unfortunate event by describing the jealous and competitive shortcomings which partly characterised the outspoken and unofficial

¹⁴³ Theobald McKenna, *Address to the Roman Catholics of Ireland Relative to the Late Proceedings*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁴ Theobald McKenna, *Substance of the Arguments offered to the General meeting of Roman Catholics, April 22, 1793, on the Question Whether the Meeting should then be Dissolved* (Dublin, 1793), p. 22.

leader of the Irish Catholic sub-committee, John Keogh, '[Keogh] has worked out McKenna first and now Burke, both with a sufficient appearance of reason, but the fact is a dirty personal jealousy, lest they might interfere with his own fame is at the bottom of all.' ¹⁴⁵

Throughout the remainder of October 1792, the active members of the Catholic sub-committee in Dublin continued to make preparations for the impending Catholic convention by meeting with clerical leaders and provincial Irish Catholics, working to finalise regional elections, and preparing new materials for publication. One item, which attracted the attention of the sub-committee, was a speech made by Captain Edward Sweetman, a Protestant freeholder from County Wexford. According to T. W. Tone's diary, Sweetman was introduced to the sub-committee on 20 October to present a speech that he had made on 22 September at a freeholders' meeting convened to discuss the Catholic Committee's circular of May 1792. This speech, which was described by Tone as, 'one of the best popular harangues I ever heard', ¹⁴⁶ strongly defended the Irish Catholic claims by stating that, 'by withholding the *elective franchise* from them, you refuse them the shield by which they might protect their new acquisition [purchased land]'. ¹⁴⁷ It was, therefore, added to the growing list of pro-Catholic propaganda, prepared and published by the Catholic Committee.

In addition to these regular and ongoing activities, Tone's diary records the introduction of certain innovative and unusual schemes that were launched in the autumn of 1792. Since the Catholic sub-committee had declared the administration at Dublin Castle to be their most powerful adversary, one such scheme involved replacing

¹⁴⁵ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 179.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, i, 197.

¹⁴⁷ *The Speech of Edward Sweetman, Captain of a Late Independent Company at a Meeting of the Freeholders of the County of Wexford Convened by the Sheriff in September of 1792 to Take Into Consideration Mr. Edward Byrne's Letter, Recommending a Plan of Delegation to the Catholics of Ireland in Order to Prepare a Humble Petition to the Legislature* (Dublin, 1792), p. 7.

the existing Irish Lord Lieutenant with a more pro-Catholic individual. The gentleman that John Keogh advocated for this appointment was the important Irish aristocrat, John James Hamilton, the Marquess of Abercorn. Lord Abercorn had been lobbying to be installed as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland for several years on the dual strengths of his personal relationship with Prime Minister William Pitt and his unusual position in Ireland. A. P. W. Malcomson has explained that Abercorn was 'one of the very few people with an Irish power base who was sufficiently English and who had sufficiently powerful connections in British politics to have a chance at being appointed to the Lord lieutenancy'.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, in strong contrast to the previous Irish Lords Lieutenant, who had all been British, Lord Abercorn was uniquely poised to make the office 'an Irish political office'.¹⁴⁹

Tone recorded that Keogh had suggested Abercorn as a potentially pro-Catholic candidate for the Lord lieutenancy on 29 September 1792 and had then instructed Tone to make indirect contact with the Irish aristocrat. On 24 October, Tone's Diary contains the description of a brief conversation to be held the following day with George Knox, one of Abercorn's parliamentary associates, in order to solicit Abercorn's support for the scheme:

Go to G. Knox and suggest to him that ... Lord Abercorn ... take up the cause of the Catholics and assume the [Lord] lieutenancy of Ireland ... It would make him the most popular Lord Lieutenant that ever was in Ireland, and secure him the strongest government; ... and that the mode itself is an honourable one, being the granting, or rather restoring, of their rights to three millions of people.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ A. P. W. Malcomson, 'A Lost Natural Leader: John James Hamilton, First Marquess of Abercorn, 1765 – 1818' *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 88 (1988), 65.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 77 [from: R. B. O'Brien (ed.) *The Autobiography of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1753-98* (London, 1898)].

Although Keogh had good reason to expect Lord Abercorn's support as he was considered by his contemporaries to be 'one of the earliest advocates of ... [the Catholic] cause' and he had written that Irish Catholics deserved 'every equality they can want, but political equality', Keogh's expectations were disappointed.¹⁵¹ Malcomson has claimed that Abercorn 'disapproved' of the Catholic Committee's activities in 1792 and, therefore, he rejected Tone's initial approach.¹⁵² Later, a false sense of his own political importance led Abercorn to try to dissuade the Catholic Committee from holding their intended convention and to rely solely on his influence at Westminster to obtain Irish Catholic relief. In spite of Keogh devising a creative solution to overcoming the opposition presented by Dublin Castle through the formation of a mutually beneficial political alliance with the Marquess of Abercorn, therefore, the scheme never succeeded and Lord Abercorn failed to become Lord Lieutenant of Ireland although certain Irish activists continued to discuss and espouse the measure for several weeks after its inception.

Arguably the single most significant event staged in the run-up to the Catholic convention, however, was an enormous public meeting, which was arranged by the Catholic Committee and had a very important and powerful impact on the immediate cause of Catholic relief. The Catholic Meeting of Dublin was held on Wednesday, 31 October 1792 and was inspired by the Catholic Committee's desire to respond publicly and directly to the charges of the county Grand Juries and, more specifically, to the anti-Catholic statements made by the Corporation of Dublin. Although numerous provincial Catholic groups had already spoken out and published defensive resolutions, at the end of October the Catholic Committee itself had not yet published a formal response. Therefore, it seemed essential to assemble the Catholics of Dublin and

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 85 & p. 75.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 77.

remedy this deficiency. In the published account of the proceedings from this important meeting, a statement of purpose was provided:

The manifesto of the Corporation of [Dublin] remains ... unanswered, and your parochial delegates conceived that, in imitation of the wise proceedings of your brethren elsewhere, you are called upon to vindicate yourselves from the false charges and false principles contained in the address of this city.¹⁵³

T. W. Tone estimated an attendance of over 640 people at this event.¹⁵⁴

Shortly after opening the meeting, the anti-Catholic resolutions published by the Corporation of Dublin were read aloud and debated. Several influential members of the Catholic Committee's sub-committee then gave detailed and emotional speeches. The most significant of these were the statements made by John Keogh, Randall McDonnell and Charles Ryan. Ultimately, the meeting was concluded with the presentation of a brief declaration by the Catholics of Dublin in response to the city corporation, an official reply which was later printed and published. Writing in his retrospective several years later, W. J. MacNeven accurately captured the proud and electric atmosphere surrounding this unprecedented event:

The meeting convened for this purpose was remarkable ... for affording to the Catholics the first opportunity of exerting their unknown and almost despised talents. All the speeches on that occasion but particularly the able, artful and argumentative declamation of Mr. Keogh; the classic and cultivated eloquence of Dr. Ryan, filled their ascendancy opponents with mortification and surprise.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, duly convened on Wednesday, October 31, 1792, at the Exhibition-Room, Exchequer Street. With the letter of the Corporation of Dublin, to the Protestants of Ireland* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 202.

¹⁵⁵ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 35.

John Keogh's substantial speech provided an overview of the Catholic movement and the activities of the Catholic Committee over the preceding months, going back as far as 1790. Moreover, he included an interpretation of the seventeenth-century events leading to the Treaty of Limerick and the rights guaranteed to Catholics, including 'the elective franchise and the benefit of trial by Jury'.¹⁵⁶ Most importantly, however, he provided a thorough description of the present state of the Catholic movement in Ireland.

Keogh outlined the objectives of the Catholic Committee, simultaneously disputing the inaccurate charges made by the Grand Juries that its members had intended to 'overawe Parliament'.¹⁵⁷ With an emotional declaration that succeeded in exciting the assembled crowd, he exclaimed:

Do we want to alter the present Constitution of King, Lords, and Commons (a cry – No - No - No). Is not our prayer, to be admitted into it, to be represented in the Commons house, by Protestant representatives, and to strengthen and defend the Constitution against any innovation? ... Why then all this clamour, all this abuse, all these unjust insinuations of riot, tumult and sedition; and what is yet more atrocious, of overawing the legislature?¹⁵⁸

Keogh answered his own question by pointing his finger at the true enemies of the Catholic movement, not the Protestants of Ireland, but 'a few monopolists'.¹⁵⁹ These individuals were accused of pursuing 'their own private interest, to keep above three millions of men in slavery' and of intentionally seeking 'to deter a whole people from

¹⁵⁶ *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, duly convened on Wednesday, October 31, 1792, at the Exhibition-Room, Exchequer Street. With the letter of the Corporation of Dublin, to the Protestants of Ireland* (Dublin, 1792), p. 53.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

petitioning for relief'.¹⁶⁰ Keogh declared, 'It is time to strip the veil that covers our oppressors ... It is time to speak out'!¹⁶¹

Before completing his powerful public address, Keogh reassured the assembled spectators that the Catholic Committee had not been deterred by the county Grand Juries, but rather that 'the different Grand-Juries have not only roused our own spirit, but called forth many and able defenders among our Protestant brethren'.¹⁶² These Irish Protestant allies included the United Irishmen, the Volunteers, and the Belfast Dissenters, about whom Keogh said 'our common enemies have united us in misfortune ... and let us fall or rise together'!¹⁶³ The published account then included the additional statement: '*Here Mr. Keogh was interrupted by loud and repeated plaudits*',¹⁶⁴ an observation which may have suggested the religious diversity of the congregated mass.

Overall, John Keogh's speech upheld the principle of Catholic relief as well as defending the Catholic Committee's peaceful pursuit of this goal. While alluding to officials in the Irish administration, it indirectly named the opponents of the Catholic movement, labelling the monopolists as 'oppressors', who were seeking to 'doom us and our children to perpetual slavery'!¹⁶⁵ Finally, in attempting to utilise the Grand Juries to further their aim, the opponents of Catholic relief revealed their true sentiments and actual intentions, while providing Keogh with a clear example of Irish Catholic obedience, an opportunity which he adroitly seized when making his speech:

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

The resolutions express alarm; they defeat themselves; 23 gentlemen in a county talk of tumult and sedition and publish their decree of eternal slavery, surrounded by *One hundred thousand* Catholics in each county; and has a single man been insulted or attacked for this cruelty? Not one instance. Indeed it brings its own refutation.¹⁶⁶

Another significant speaker at the Dublin Catholic Meeting of 31 October 1792 was Randall McDonnell, who agreed with Keogh on certain points. He too drew a sharp distinction between the anti-Catholic monopolists and the pro-Catholic Protestants in Ireland. He described this latter group as 'the liberal, informed, and virtuous Protestants', citing clear examples such as 'our illustrious friends in both Houses of Parliament; to the Protestants of Cork and Wexford; to our patriotic societies; to the town of Belfast, and Volunteers of Ulster'.¹⁶⁷ McDonnell compared the present weakness of the anti-Catholic monopolists to the superior strength of the pro-Catholic Protestants by drawing attention to 'the thinly attended county meetings of Protestant freeholders'.¹⁶⁸ In a further logical step, McDonnell also made an outspoken prediction of the potentially frightening influence of the monopolists' propaganda on the Irish public: 'thus are the undiscerning, the bigoted, or prejudiced Protestants duped by their interested brethren'.¹⁶⁹ McDonnell, therefore, recognised the monopolists' present shortcomings, while drawing attention to the possible future threat posed by them of inciting widespread anti-Catholicism throughout Ireland.

A final important Catholic sub-committee member to present a speech before the assembled crowd at the October meeting was Mr. Ryan. In a letter to his cousin in Galway, one Dublin eye-witness mentioned that after the 'great meeting last Wednesday, which was attended by all the respectable Catholics of Dublin ... Dr.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Ryan's speech is much talked of'.¹⁷⁰ Like this correspondent, both Tone and W. J. MacNeven noted the excellence of 'Dr. Ryan's' speech.¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, however, this has led to some confusion as the published account of the meeting names the speaker not as Dr. Thomas Ryan, but as Mr. Charles Ryan.¹⁷² Since both men were active members of the Catholic Committee's sub-committee, the correct identity of the speaker must remain uncertain, although the existence of three completely separate and unconnected sources might tend to refute the inaccuracy of a single printed pamphlet, and, therefore, to suggest that the speaker's correct name should indeed be Dr. Thomas Ryan and not Mr. Charles Ryan.

In addition to a familiar defence of the Committee's 'silent, respectable and guarded proceeding' which was 'dragged into public'¹⁷³ by the reaction of monopolists and Grand Juries, Ryan's speech contained an interesting reference to David Hume's *Essay on a Perfect Commonwealth*. Ryan explained that the Committee's plan for elections had been outlined in the respectable essay and was, therefore, strongly advisable and highly recommended. He also drew links between other important enlightenment philosophers and the Catholic cause in Ireland:

I will not quote an author whose principles may be disallowed as impracticable or abstract, but I will cite those whose orthodoxy is universally admitted, and they are Locke, Montesquieu, Blackstone, and Paine - we are told by these writers, that to inflict a civil punishment without a civil crime, on any sect of people, is religious persecution.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ National Library of Ireland, *Bellews of Mount Bellew Papers*, MS 27, 145 [Christopher Bellew to Christopher Dillon Bellew, 6 November 1792].

¹⁷¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 202 & W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 35.

¹⁷² *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, duly convened on Wednesday, October 31, 1792, at the Exhibition-Room, Exchequer Street. With the letter of the Corporation of Dublin, to the Protestants of Ireland* (Dublin, 1792), p. 15.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

These citations serve as some of the most significant attempts by the Irish Catholic Committee to link the religious settlement of eighteenth-century Ireland to wider political philosophies and universal cases of unjust religious persecution. Ryan, thereby, raised the Irish Catholic call for relief to a higher level, connecting penal restrictions in Ireland to social injustice throughout history. In keeping with these efforts, before concluding Ryan also drew his audience's attention to the likely effects of contemporary international trends on Ireland:

The Irish Catholics; who have seen the revolutions of America and France; who have heard their cause discussed and applauded ... with such information and such stimuli; must be torpid indeed, if they continued insensible to the blessings of liberty.¹⁷⁵

Following the electrifying and remarkable speeches made at the Catholic Meeting of 31 October and proceeding from a motion advanced by Randall McDonnell that afternoon to prepare an official response to the letter of the Corporation of Dublin, the Catholic Committee published a brief declaration several days later. Although this published declaration served one of the same general purposes as the October Catholic meeting, to respond to the anti-Catholic vitriol expressed by the Corporation of Dublin, as a shorter and far more limited transmission, it could not have had the same impact as the important public meeting. After expressing 'mortification and surprise' at the Corporation's slanderous address, the declaration reiterated the Catholic desire for emancipation, again insisting 'it is not power, it is protection we solicit. It is not power, ... it is the *equal enjoyment* of our Rights that we claim'.¹⁷⁶ The declaration stated bluntly 'as a political truth, that no elected and delegated Legislature has a right to disfranchise its Electors and Delegators'.¹⁷⁷ The brief public reply also contained a

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 9-10.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 55 & 59.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 56.

response to the Dublin Corporation's justification for the penal system, 'the right of conquest', ¹⁷⁸ by drawing an innovative correlation between British authority over Ireland and the Protestant control of Ireland:

If conquest and the right of the sword could justify the stronger in retaining dominion, why did Great-Britain abdicate her legislative supremacy over Ireland [in 1782]? ... Is that monstrous and exploded principle still to be retained for our peculiar subjection, which was felt to be false by every honest man, when applied to the subjection of his native land? ¹⁷⁹

This statement drew an unusual comparison between the rights of subjected Catholics and the freedom of a conquered Ireland, an opinion which contained strong undertones of nationalism. Finally, the Catholic Committee's brief declaration ended with a promise that 'we never will, ... desist from the peaceable and lawful pursuit of the two great objects of our hopes [the elective franchise and trial by jury]'. ¹⁸⁰

During the month of November 1792, in the final weeks leading up to the Catholic convention, the Catholic Committee remained busy, finalising essential details. Tone's diary states that by 10 November delegates had been chosen in 25 counties and all of the great cities and that by 18 November County Mayo had also returned the names of its delegates to the convention. In a letter dated 17 November, the Irish Lord Lieutenant made interesting speculations regarding the county elections:

Whether the delegates have or have not been chosen precisely according to the rules laid down in Mr. Byrne's Paper [the May circular]: in some places it has been exactly followed and in others and perhaps in general the elections have been made without that regular organisation which is prescribed. ¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁸¹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/70-82 [Westmorland to Dundas, 17 November 1792].

As some of these country delegates began arriving in Dublin by the middle of the month, John Keogh and the sub-committee made appropriate efforts to entertain and speak with these Catholic delegates upon their arrival. Tone's diary specifically mentioned Keogh's attempts to sway the Catholic delegate from County Leitrim, O'Beirne, and to secure his future support.

Other Committee concerns prior to the convention included the ongoing discussions with Lord Abercorn, who, in Tone's words, continued to propose 'that the Catholics should renounce the present system for the chance of what he would do for them'.¹⁸² Surviving evidence also suggests that throughout the month the sub-committee searched to find a suitable space for the large assembly. After failed attempts, at a meeting of the Society of United Irishmen in late November the question was asked, 'where will they assemble?'¹⁸³ Perhaps the most important sub-committee activity in advance of the convention, however, was the preparation of two separate petitions to parliament and to the King, an especially bold, innovative and direct approach that the Catholic Committee had never before attempted. According to Tone, he worked with Keogh on these important items and then presented them for consideration at a meeting of the sub-committee, which was held on 17 November. He was pleased to report that the address to King George III was universally liked and widely accepted.

Opponents of the Catholic cause and the Irish government were also engaged in discussions and preparations in November 1792, in advance of the expected Catholic convention. An account exists of an incident in Lower Ormond where the Catholic tenants on one estate were assembled and ordered to sign an address 'for the purpose of frustrating the endeavours of the General Committee to obtain emancipation for

¹⁸² William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 205 [11 November 1792].

¹⁸³ National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/109 [23 November 1792].

themselves and the body at large'.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, in Dublin, Castle officials attempted to obtain information in order to decide upon the wisest course of action. Chief Secretary Hobart gained intelligence on Catholic Committee activities by summoning Archbishop Troy to the Castle for an interview. In Richard Burke's very thorough description of this event he included details of the conversation, in which Hobart and Sir Hercules Langrishe learned of the Committee's intention to submit a separate petition to the king:

Hobart asked Troy what the Catholics meant to do. When he said they intended to petition the King; they said, 'What petition the King! The most improper thing you can do. It will ruin your cause. Do you know that government in England will receive no communication except through the Lord Lieutenant? By all means dissuade this measure &c &c'. Troy said it was the prevailing idea among the Catholics and he believed could not be prevented.¹⁸⁵

According to Burke, this plan 'frightens and puzzles [the Irish officials] beyond measure'.¹⁸⁶ This official interview must have taken place in the first half of November, as Tone later remarked in a diary entry dated 16 November 1792, that the Castle officials feared the Catholic petition would 'embarrass his Majesty', to which Tone replied in his diary, 'The devil it will! ... We will address him, please God, and let him refuse it if he pleases, better that his sacred majesty should be embarrassed than a nation kept in slavery'.¹⁸⁷

Despite their concerns and misgivings, however, Irish officials took no step to obstruct the Catholic convention in Dublin. Writing to Westminster in mid-November, Lord Lieutenant Westmorland had to acknowledge, 'I see no appearance that there is

¹⁸⁴ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 284 [15 November 1792].

¹⁸⁵ Marshall, P. J. and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 295-6 [Richard to Edmund Burke, November 1792].

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 206.

any intention on the part of the Catholics to resort to immediate force'.¹⁸⁸ The cautious and legal methods pursued by the Catholic Committee throughout 1792, therefore, helped to ensure the success of the convention and to discourage the Castle from interfering. Although Irish officials did not actively prevent the Catholic delegates from assembling, they continued to harbour deep concerns. Hobart continued to assert that 'Mr. Keogh and a particular set of Catholics openly profess their approbation of the levelling system and exalt in the success of the French armies'.¹⁸⁹ Similarly Westmorland observed that:

Whatever may be the conduct of their assembly the circumstances of its formation, existence, and continuance are, in my mind, highly alarming as it tends to erect a government of Roman Catholics entirely distinct from the Protestant government and completely republican.¹⁹⁰

III

The Great Catholic Convention

The site ultimately found for the Catholic convention of 1792 was in Tailor's Hall in Back Lane, located a few steps away from Dublin's Christ Church Cathedral. Although evidence is scarce, this commodious venue may have been specially decorated for the occasion because, in November, Tone had suggested to Keogh 'to go to some expense in fitting up the room for the Committee, as it will give the country delegates a high idea of their own consequence and the importance of the business'.¹⁹¹ Additionally, although confirmation is equally unavailable, a suggestion was made to

¹⁸⁸ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/70-82 [Westmorland to Dundas, 17 November 1792].

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, [15 November 1792].

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, [17 November 1792].

¹⁹¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 206 [14 November 1792].

Edward Byrne in late November to arrange to sell newly printed copies of the pamphlet *A Letter from Richard Burke, Esq. to ***** Esq. of Cork in Which the Legality and Propriety of the Meeting Recommended in Mr. Byrne's Circular Letter are Discussed*, outside of Tailor's Hall to coincide with the convention: 'I would recommend your getting a man to sell them on that day at the assembly room door'.¹⁹² Whether or not these special preparations were made, however, it is indisputable that when the anticipated assembly finally opened on 3 December, the proceedings were held with sufficient decorum and fanfare to excite and impress Dublin society. W. J. MacNeven has described this phenomenon, comparing it to the virtual obscurity of the old Committee:

[Whose] existence was nearly unknown to the greater part of the Protestant community ... This committee assembled with the utmost publicity and so imposing was its appearance from numbers and respectability that its original title was soon merged in the more expressive appellation of the Catholic convention.¹⁹³

The Catholic Convention of 1792 met for six days at Tailor's Hall between 3 and 8 December. Records of some of the proceedings were kept by T. W. Tone and by an anonymous 'delegate', who later published *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, With the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot*.¹⁹⁴ According to *A Brief Account*, the first action was taken by the Catholic Committee's secretary who read 'over returns and every person present answered his name'.¹⁹⁵ Both accounts then indicated that

¹⁹² National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/111 [Haly to Edward Byrne, Cork, 28 November 1792].

¹⁹³ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 38.

¹⁹⁴ Although it is purely speculative, the presence of nearly complete speeches by W. J. MacNeven in this pamphlet might hint at his authorship and identity as the anonymous and unnamed 'delegate'.

¹⁹⁵ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, with the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 1.

certain men were selected to preside over the assembly each day, starting with Edward Byrne on Monday, 3 December. Tone has provided an excellent explanation for granting Byrne this mark of honour: 'In every cause he had exposed himself to every species of calumny and abuse. His name had been held up as a target, against which the arrows of prejudice, falsehood and corruption had been unnecessarily discharged.'¹⁹⁶

Following the completion of these preliminaries, the Catholic sub-committee proposed a resolution to assert that they were the only competent organ empowered to speak on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland. Tone explained that a complaint expressed by Theobald McKenna forced them to change 'only competent' to 'competent' to preserve the Committee's democratic structure and to safeguard the rights of the Catholic body 'who were alone empowered to determine this question'¹⁹⁷ through their representatives. This ultimately resulted in the final declaration of 'alone competent and authorised to speak and act on behalf of the [Catholic] body'.¹⁹⁸ A brief debate then arose after McKenna proposed a motion, reminiscent of a much older Catholic Committee tradition, to grant the Catholic gentry an automatic right to attend the convention. This led to a vote, the outcome of which was described by the Lord Lieutenant in a letter to Home Secretary Henry Dundas at Westminster:

A question was put whether the gentlemen of landed property, not so elected, should be admitted and after long debate they were excluded. The management of the whole business, therefore, fell under the power of Dublin residents at the head of whom is Mr. Keogh, the mercer.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 76.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., [Captain Sweetman of Wexford].

¹⁹⁸ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, with the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 1.

¹⁹⁹ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3] & British Library, *Hardwicke Papers*, Add. MS. 35933, fol. 62r [Westmorland to Dundas, 7 December 1792].

Finally, the sub-committee read aloud the petition to the king, which they had prepared prior to the convention.

Tone's record stated that, with the exception of minor word changes to the sixth paragraph, the petition was perfectly acceptable to the assembled Catholic delegates. Upon reaching the very end, however, a series of very eloquent objections were raised. In keeping with the position that they had maintained throughout much of 1792, the sub-committee had focussed its efforts on two particular grievances that had not been contained in Langrishe's bill, the elective franchise and equal participation on juries. These two items, therefore, were specifically cited and requested by the sub-committee at the close of the Irish Catholic petition. When this was presented to the convention, the delegates expressed strong demands for change.

The anonymous author of *A Brief Account* attempted to convey the atmosphere present in Tailor's Hall at this point on the first day of the convention. He claimed that the discussion which arose in objection to the final paragraph of the petition 'was not the angry contention of rival parties, predetermined to adhere to their respective opinions - It was a free and honest discussion, a competition of zeal to promote a common interest.'²⁰⁰ A suggestion was first made by Luke Teeling of County Antrim to replace the sub-committee's two specific, but limited, requests with an all-encompassing, general request for complete emancipation and 'ALL THE RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THEIR COUNTRY:'²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, With the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), pp. 2-3.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

His instructions from his constituents were to require nothing short of total emancipation and it was not consistent with the dignity of this meeting and much less of the great body whom it represented to sanction, by anything which could be construed, into acquiescence on their part one fragment of that unjust and abominable system, the penal code. It lay with the paternal wisdom of the sovereign to ascertain what he thought fit to be granted, but it was the duty of this meeting to put him fully and unequivocally in possession of the wants and wishes of his people.²⁰²

Both records indicated that Teeling's remarks were received with 'extravagant applause'.²⁰³ The author of *A Brief Account* also explained that 'never, perhaps, was any proposal more cordially received', for 'it was plain, that to men animated by such sentiments, a half measure, or fraction of freedom, would never be satisfactory'.²⁰⁴ Teeling's proposal was, therefore, promptly seconded by D. T. O'Brien, who supported the scheme while insisting, 'let us not deceive our sovereign and our constituents nor approach the throne with a suppression of the truth. Now is our time to speak.'²⁰⁵

Although the members of the Catholic sub-committee must have been extremely surprised by this unexpected turn of events, they did not oppose making a request for complete emancipation. Despite the Catholic delegates effectively seizing control of the convention and steering the Catholic movement towards emancipation and away from the sub-committee's more cautious emphasis on enfranchisement, John Keogh reportedly stated, 'that he entirely agreed with the spirit of the motion and he was satisfied that they had but to ask and they should receive'.²⁰⁶ At this point, however, he did recommend an adjournment until the following day because 'the meeting had already dispatched a great deal of business and the hour was now late and

²⁰² William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 77 [Luke Teeling].

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, With the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 3.

²⁰⁵ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 77.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., i, 78.

the question was of the very last importance'.²⁰⁷ Finally, just before adjourning, Keogh urged the delegates to pause and to consider 'the magnitude of your demand and power of your enemies ... Are you prepared to support your claim?'²⁰⁸ According to T. Wolfe Tone's diary, 'the whole assembly rose, as one man, and, raising their right hands, answered, 'WE ARE'. It was a sublime spectacle'.²⁰⁹ To this Keogh simply replied:

Then I honour and rejoice in a spirit which must render your success infallible ... but let it not be said that you took up a resolution of this infinite magnitude in a fit of enthusiasm. Let us agree to retire. We meet again tomorrow. We will consider this question in the morning and whatever be the determination of the meeting, it will not be accused of want of temperance or consideration.²¹⁰

Luke Teeling, the County Antrim delegate credited with proposing the request for total emancipation on the first day of the convention, had a similar background to many of the other Irish Catholic activists. Marianne Elliott describes Teeling as a prosperous merchant, a linen bleacher and wine merchant in Lisburn, who was 'the richest and most prominent Catholic in Ulster'.²¹¹ His son was Charles Teeling, who; Elliott claims, 'was treated with considerable deference by Lord Castlereagh'.²¹² Moreover, Teeling's son-in-law was John Maginnis, a linen merchant who represented County Down at the Catholic Convention. Although Luke Teeling may not have been a member of the Society of United Irishmen, through his personal and family connections he was closely connected to the reform societies of Ulster. Tone has left accounts of a meeting held by Teeling at the 'Donegal Arms', wherein questions were asked regarding the appropriate extent of Catholic requests. At the conclusion of this

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Denis Gwynn, *John Keogh*, p. 53.

²⁰⁹ Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998), p. 67.

²¹⁰ Denis Gwynn, *John Keogh*, p. 54.

²¹¹ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, p. 237.

²¹² Ibid.

meeting it was ultimately decided that, 'Catholic delegates should frame a petition in general terms for the removal of every grievance and refer it back to the constituents for approbation and then bring it forward'.²¹³ Based on these directions, therefore, it was highly probable that Teeling had already, prior to arriving at the Catholic assembly, formulated a plan to oppose any request for limited relief and to propose instead complete emancipation. This was further supported by Tone's record, which described a meeting held by Belfast Dissenters in late November, which was followed by the transmission of instructions to Teeling. Included among these instructions were the opinions that 'specific requests by Catholics' would hinder reform and that the Catholics 'should desire nothing short of Rights of Man'.²¹⁴

In accord with this approach, when the Catholic convention reassembled on the following day, 4 December 1792, Teeling voiced the ideas of his Ulster allies and again urged the Catholic delegates 'not to wrong their cause by asking for less than complete emancipation'.²¹⁵ According to Tone's record, at this point on the second day of the convention a committee was formed with D. T. O'Brien as chairman to consider amending the closing paragraph of the petition. Passionate speeches were given by several delegates in support of this measure, including McKenna, who believed that the convention was 'not bound' by the two items specified in the May circular,²¹⁶ and MacNeven, whose remarks were reported in *A Brief Account*.

MacNeven explained that he had supported the previous night's adjournment 'in order that we may join to our enthusiasm the steadfastness of reflection; that our decision may be no less the sentiment of our hearts, than the suggestion of our

²¹³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 221.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Denis Gwynn, *John Keogh*, p. 55.

²¹⁶ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 227.

heads'.²¹⁷ He then agreed with McKenna's statement, claiming that, if the convention were to follow the mere 'advice' contained in the May circular, it 'involves this absurdity, that a part could dictate to the whole - that twelve gentlemen could prescribe a specific redress to the Catholic people'.²¹⁸ After virtually dismissing the scheme pursued and advocated by the Catholic sub-committee for over six months, MacNeven gave an impassioned and eloquent plea for total emancipation:

If we were at this moment possessed of an equal participation in the Elective Franchise and the Trial by Jury, I ask any man would he consent that we should renounce all further claims? No, he would answer, that as there are no subjects more deserving, there ought to be none more privileged ... The nation expects it; its eyes are upon us. It will not pardon our supine ness, though it may pity our distress; it will not forgive so fatal an error as to lag behind the progression of knowledge.²¹⁹

The speaker, who won the support of the other delegates, bluntly asserted 'the greatest blunder we could commit, and the greatest danger to our cause - to ask too little'.²²⁰

Before holding the vote to decide whether or not to change the closing paragraph in order to request a complete emancipation, Luke Teeling spoke again. Seeking to reassure the delegates if the government should refuse to grant the requested Catholic emancipation, he simply stated, 'if such an event should take place, our duty is obvious. We are to tell our constituents and they, not we, are to determine'. This calming proposal upheld the democratic principles of the convention while swaying the delegates and ensuring the measure's success. By an unanimous vote the Catholic petition to the crown was amended to reflect this change. After a series of discussions on specific word choices, which resulted in the removal of phrases such as 'rights of

²¹⁷ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, With the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 11.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

citizens' and 'free Constitution', ²²¹ the completed final paragraph stated, 'we cannot suppress our wishes of being restored to the rights and privileges of the Constitution of our country'. ²²²

An additional issue that was introduced on 4 December, but not resolved until the following day, involved the addition of the delegates' signatures. T. W. Tone's account includes a resolution stating that the delegates' signatures and the constituencies they represented should be affixed to the petition before its mode of transmission had been determined. On 5 December, however, opposition was raised and certain delegates supported a delay until the mode of transmission could be decided. This resulted in a debate wherein the majority of delegates spoke in favour of immediate signatures. Keogh urged 'let the petition go where it may, to England or Ireland, it ought to go as strong in signatures as possible'. ²²³ Similarly, the only Irish Protestant delegate elected to sit at the convention, Captain Edward Sweetman of County Wexford, who had met the sub-committee the preceding October after speaking in defence of Catholic rights at a freeholders' meeting on 22 September, expressed his agreement. The representative of County Wexford eloquently stated his belief, 'that every delegate should instantly pledge himself to support with his hand and signature the sense of the majority'. ²²⁴ According to Tone's record, this then led to a resolution in favour of each delegate supporting 'the sense of the majority' and to the production of a printed list of signatures, which was affixed to the petition, certified, and 'furnished to subscribers'. ²²⁵

Although the Catholics decided to put off consideration of an appropriate mode of transmission until the following day, on 6 December it quickly developed into the

²²¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 227.

²²² *Petition of the Catholics of Ireland, January 2, 1793*.

²²³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 229.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, i, 80.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, i, 228.

most contentious issue at the convention. In *A Brief Account*, the author speculated that transmission 'alone occasioned more diversity of opinion than all the rest'.²²⁶ This occurred after several delegates called for a change to the traditional procedure of sending an Irish petition through the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, who would have been responsible for forwarding it to the royal government at Westminster. Reflecting over the poor treatment that they felt they had received from government over the preceding months, the delegates expressed their deep distrust. Keogh mentioned how 'ministers here have always laboured to oppose the Catholics'.²²⁷ Then, a young, outspoken delegate from County Galway, Christopher Dillon Bellew, rose from his seat and moved 'that the petition should be sent to the foot of the throne by a deputation to be chosen from the General Committee',²²⁸ a suggestion that was promptly seconded.

Tone's record had implied that there may have been whispers and peripheral discussions among the delegates about an alternative mode of transmission before 6 December. Moreover, there is conclusive evidence of ongoing negotiations between the Catholics and certain Irish politicians to make arrangements for the petition's transmission through Dublin Castle. For example, after Christopher Dillon Bellew had made his bold suggestion on 6 December, sub-committee members had to act quickly to diffuse the enthusiasm at the convention and to request a delay so that these outside negotiations could be concluded. The delegates agreed to wait while Keogh and other unspecified members of the sub-committee went to speak with the sympathetic Lord Donoughmore, a pro-Catholic Irish politician who had been acting as an unofficial liaison between the Castle and the Catholic convention and who had been attempting to

²²⁶ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, with the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 4.

²²⁷ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 229.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, i, 81.

persuade the delegates to transmit their petition through the Irish Lord Lieutenant according to traditional practice.

Earlier that morning Donoughmore had led the Catholic leaders to believe that the Castle would happily receive the petition and transmit it to Westminster with 'warm recommendations and a packet hired express'.²²⁹ The delegates, therefore, demanded confirmation of this offer and agreed to a brief delay, while the Catholic sub-committee attempted to obtain Donoughmore's assurance of the Castle's good intentions. MacNeven described how Donoughmore 'was informed by order of the meeting that if the Lord Lieutenant would promise to forward the petition with a recommendation in its favour it should be entrusted to him'.²³⁰ Unfortunately, however, the reply Donoughmore received from Westmorland stated that 'his Excellency could not – in his official situation pledge himself to the required recommendation'.²³¹ Upon hearing this, Keogh quickly returned to the assembled delegates at Tailor's Hall, accusing Donoughmore of playing a 'trick' on them by representing a vague, private conversation as an official endorsement.²³² Tone described Keogh's attempt to explain the confused situation to the convention:

It appeared that the parties had either mistaken each other or their powers or the intentions of the administration, for it was stated by [Keogh] ... that what had been supposed to be offered was merely a conversation between a very respectable individual and himself, but he had nothing to communicate from any authority.²³³

²²⁹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 230.

²³⁰ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, pp. 39-40.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 230.

²³³ *Ibid.*, i, 81.

Following the arrival of this latest information, therefore, the Catholics were forced to make their final decision without the benefit of the Castle's cooperation, which they had been anticipating.

Some delegates, including McKenna and D. T. O'Brien, believed that the petition ought to be sent through the Castle as the option which was 'the most constitutional and least likely to inflame the opposition'.²³⁴ In *A Brief Account*, the author also explained that in addition to being the customary channel by which 'his Majesty sees the state, and hears the complaints or gratuls, of his people of Ireland: - that to pass over the government would be such an impeachment of its conduct, as could not be readily conciliated'.²³⁵ Despite these significant concerns and considerations, however, the majority opinion at the convention was strongly in favour of a direct transmission of the petition to Westminster by an Irish Catholic deputation.

John Keogh displayed his standard suspicions and frustration with the Irish officials in Dublin Castle by asking the assembled Catholics, 'will you trust your petition to such men?' a query to which the exasperated delegates reportedly exclaimed, 'No!'²³⁶ Then, Christopher Dillon Bellew rose to defend his earlier suggestion for a deputation from the convention to travel to Westminster. He explained that, in addition to any past insults, 'he had no confidence in men who kept no faith with Catholics and the attempt of the present day had satisfied his mind'.²³⁷ The outspoken delegate from County Galway also told the assembled Catholics:

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, i, 230 [D. T. O'Brien, 6 December 1792].

²³⁵ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, With the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 5.

²³⁶ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 81.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

It has been said my plan is disrespectful to administration. I answer it is intended to be so. It is time for us to speak out like men. We will not ... like African slaves, petition our task masters. Our sovereign will never consider it disrespectful that we lay before his throne the dutiful and humble petition of three millions of loyal and suffering subjects. For my part, I know I speak the sentiments of my country.²³⁸

These bold statements won the support of most of the other delegates, who also insisted that they had no concern for the 'wounded pride' of the Irish officials in the Castle. Hugh MacDermot of County Sligo said, 'I believe it will be wounded, but I care not; I consider only the pride of the Catholics of Ireland'.²³⁹ The enthusiastic delegate from County Wexford, James Edward Devereux, famously declared 'let us mark our abhorrence of the measures of our enemies, for they are the enemies of Ireland. The present administration has not the confidence of the people!'; an exclamation to which the Catholic assembly reportedly replied, 'No! No!' ²⁴⁰ Following these dramatic denunciations a clear decision was made and the Catholic convention agreed to follow Bellew's plan and appoint a five-man deputation, which would journey to England with the Catholic petition and lay it directly at the foot of the throne.

The plan became an official resolution on the following day, 7 December 1792. The delegates provided the five men with a warrant 'to act on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland' and gave them the instruction 'to adhere to the spirit of the petition and admit nothing derogatory to that union, which is the strength of Ireland'. ²⁴¹ It was insightfully observed by the author of *A Brief Account* that, by sending the deputation,

²³⁸ Ibid., i, 82.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 232.

the Irish Catholics could make a personal appearance and, thereby, 'could supply the deficiencies which the form of a petition necessarily included'.²⁴²

Although both Tone and Westmorland cited the use of a 'ballot' in the selection of the deputation, Tone's diary also suggests the possibility of an alternate sequence of events.²⁴³ In his diary, Tone briefly alludes to a statement made by Randall MacDonnell specifically proposing the names of the five men, who were ultimately confirmed by the other Catholic delegates to represent the convention at Westminster. Two of these individuals were nationally acclaimed leaders of the Catholic sub-committee in Dublin, who had been publicly active in the cause of Catholic rights throughout 1792 and who had participated in the Catholic convention, namely, John Keogh and Edward Byrne. The other three proposed choices, however, were neither Catholic sub-committee members nor wealthy merchants, rather they were members of the Irish Catholic gentry representing Irish counties known for possessing large numbers of Catholic landowners. According to the author of *A Brief Account*, like Edward Byrne they all shared the honour of presiding as chairmen at some point in the convention.²⁴⁴ The names of these Catholic gentlemen chosen to join the five-man deputation were James Edward Devereux of Wexford, Christopher Dillon Bellew of Galway, and Sir Thomas French of Galway.

Christopher Dillon Bellew had distinguished himself at the convention by proposing that a Catholic deputation should travel to Westminster and then by making powerful and memorable speeches to the assembled delegates in defence of this scheme. Prior to the Catholic Convention of 1792, he had spent parts of his childhood

²⁴² *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, with the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 5.

²⁴³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 83 & National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Westmorland to Dundas, 7 December 1792].

²⁴⁴ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, with the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793).

being educated on the continent. Although Bellew had close relatives engaged in commerce, he was able to avoid this profession because his father possessed at least 10, 000 acres in County Galway, land which Christopher Dillon later inherited.²⁴⁵ The penal laws, and particularly the restrictions on Catholic property and inheritance, therefore, were a constant concern and a huge hindrance to the landowning Bellew family. In her important and thorough study of the history of the Bellews, Karen Harvey has succinctly described the impact of this penal legislation and how it may have driven Christopher Dillon Bellew into political activism:

[The penal laws] did force [the Bellews] into technically illegal actions and complex litigation. The time-consuming, expensive machinations involved must surely have been not only annoying but psychologically draining; references to the laws in letters between family members are often couched in terms of frustration and despair that the penal structure would ever be changed ... Such references should serve as a reminder that a discriminatory legal system can have far greater impact than that of the material penalties imposed on those who violate it.²⁴⁶

Another Catholic landowner from County Galway selected to join the deputation to Westminster was Sir Thomas French. According to certain references made by Karen Harvey, the Bellew and the French families may have had some familial links, but there is no evidence that Christopher Dillon Bellew was directly related to Thomas French. The Catholic sub-committee had met with French during the preceding autumn when some leaders, including Thomas Braughall and T. W. Tone, were forced to travel to Connaught to counteract provincial doubts over the Committee's plan for elections. Thomas French had shown himself to be an active and involved member of the County Galway Catholics and he had served as chairman at the important meeting with the Catholic sub-committee on 8 October.

²⁴⁵ Karen J. Harvey, *The Bellews of Mount Bellew: A Catholic Gentry Family in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), p. 17.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

Despite this clear commitment to the Catholic cause, which had been demonstrated through his political endeavours in Galway, Thomas French was the most inexplicable and least logical choice among the men selected to travel to Westminster. Evidence suggests that this may have provoked controversy in 1792. Writing to his first cousin, Christopher Dillon Bellew, Dublin merchant Christopher Bellew expressed his strong opinion of Thomas French that, 'from his conduct ... he does not deserve the honour of presenting our petition'.²⁴⁷

The final member of the five-man deputation was also of the Catholic gentry and was a member of one of the few remaining Catholic 'core Wexford families'.²⁴⁸ Like Thomas French, James Edward Devereux had been consistently involved in provincial politics in his home county throughout 1792. He was a regular correspondent with the sub-committee in Dublin and he had become passionately outspoken in defence of Catholic rights. Writing to Archbishop Troy in April 1792, James Caulfield of Ferns described Devereux as 'a young, hot-headed libertine and more attached to the Committee than to any other body or order existing. Yet he has acquired an amazing influence on the people by his harangues and specious promises of a total emancipation.'²⁴⁹

Like Christopher Dillon Bellew, this 'hot-headed libertine' had helped to distinguish himself at the Catholic Convention through his eloquent defence of Bellew's proposal and with powerful speeches, which were recorded in Tone's diary. For example, in the debates that arose on 7 and 8 December involving the Committee's proposed publication, *Vindication of the Cause of the Catholics of Ireland, Adopted*,

²⁴⁷ National Library of Ireland, *Bellews of Mount Bellew Papers*, MS 27, 145.

²⁴⁸ Kevin Whelan, 'The Catholic Community in Eighteenth-Century County Wexford' in *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, (ed.) T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), p. 129.

²⁴⁹ Eamon O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Convention and Anglo-Irish Politics, 1791- 1793', *Archivium Hibernicum*, xl (1985), 22 [22 April 1792, Troy MS 6/11/20].

and Ordered to be Published by the General Committee, at a Meeting Held at Taylor's Hall, Back-Lane, December 7, 1792, which was intended to act 'as a commentary on their petition, a defence of their own conduct, and a refutation of the malicious and unfounded charges of their adversaries', ²⁵⁰ Devereux successfully argued in favour of unrestricted expression. In opposition to certain delegates, who voiced a concern for 'propriety' and 'respect for high station', ²⁵¹ J. E. Devereux insisted that it would be wrong to alter or remove the names of certain Irish officials mentioned in the pamphlet:

What, are we to spare one man [Foster] who smells of the blood of our peasantry? Or another [FitzGibbon] who made it his public and profligate boast that he would prostrate the chapels of the Catholics? We know that man ... the road to his favour is through his fears. Let us become formidable to him and we shall be respected. He is the calumniator of the people and, therefore, he has our hatred and our contempt ... Are we to tender a gratuitous submission to men who have held us in fetters and in mockery and in scorn? What have we to fear but our own disunion? Let us boldly acknowledge our friends and mark our enemies. Let us respect ourselves and the world will respect us and above all let us not disgrace our cause ... by indecision, or temporising, or equivocation. ²⁵²

At the conclusion of the convention the assembled delegates decided to follow Devereux's suggestion and publicly to name these Irish officials in the latest Catholic Committee publication. According to Tone, Captain Edward Sweetman, Randall MacDonnell and John Keogh all spoke in defence of this tactic. In the final days of the convention the delegates also welcomed a visit from two of Ireland's leading Catholic clerics, Archbishop John Thomas Troy and Bishop Francis Moylan of Cork. These clergymen were introduced to 'standing plaudits', ²⁵³ as they made their way into the assembly room and they, ultimately, added their prestigious signatures to the *Petition of the Catholics of Ireland*. Troy had apparently been impressed by the 'moderate

²⁵⁰ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 84.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*, i, 85 [James Edward Devereux, 7 December 1792].

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, i, 233.

character' ²⁵⁴ of the Catholic convention and he believed that it would be beneficial to maintain good relations with the Irish Catholic laity and, also, to have clerical opinion represented at the assembly. He defended his decision to attend and speak at the convention in a letter to Thomas Bray on 8 December:

We were induced to go there yesterday by a misrepresentation of our motives ... When read, I arose and expressed my entire approbation of the loyalty and respect which appeared throughout the whole of it ... and concluded by observing that it was the determination of the clergy to rise or fall with their people. What we said was frequently interrupted and received with signals of great satisfaction. ²⁵⁵

On the last day of the Catholic convention, 8 December 1792, the delegates completed business by preparing a circular address to the Catholic people of Ireland, informing them of their actions and the decision taken to request total emancipation and to transmit the petition by a five-man deputation to Westminster. The letter concluded with the earnest recommendation to maintain peace: 'nothing can be so fatal to our hopes of emancipation as the least appearance of riot, tumult or disorder'. ²⁵⁶ On 8 December the delegates also resolved to reassemble when needed, to communicate promptly with constituents, and, thereafter, to consider every delegate at the convention to be a member of the Catholic sub-committee. Finally, gracious thanks were given to their numerous supporters, including the citizens of Belfast, Grattan and their friends in parliament, the sub-committee and its assistant secretary, T. W. Tone. As the Catholic delegates vacated Tailor's Hall for the last time, however, they must have been aware of the uncertainty facing the mission undertaken by their deputation, which was scheduled to depart for England as soon as possible.

²⁵⁴ Vincent J. McNally, *Reform, Revolution and Reaction, Archbishop John Thomas Troy and the Catholic Church in Ireland, 1787-1817*, p. 61.

²⁵⁵ P. O'Donoghue, 'The Catholic Church and Ireland in an Age of Revolution and Rebellion, 1782-1803' (unpublished PhD thesis, UCD, 1975), pp. 190-92 [Bray Papers 1792/23].

²⁵⁶ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/42/51 [*'Circular Letter to Catholics'*].

The unprecedented outcome of the six-day-long Catholic convention excited interest throughout Ireland. Writing in his diary in December 1792, James Scully of County Tipperary included a brief remark, that 'the Catholic Committee of the Kingdom sent five delegates with their petition to London to the King. The twenty-seventh - the inhabitants in and about Tipperary met in Tipperary and testified their approbation of the emancipation of the Catholics'.²⁵⁷ The Irish administration was similarly interested in the Catholics' activities. Evidence from Tone's diary suggests that the Castle had been kept apprised of proceedings while the delegates were still assembled. In particular, during the final days of the convention Tone referred to an offer that may have been extended by Irish officials to transmit the Catholic petition to Westminster if first submitted to them. According to Tone, after receiving news of this desperate offer, Edward Byrne replied, 'if the Lord Lieutenant and Secretary were in the outer room, it is now too late, we have decided'.²⁵⁸ Finally, Lord Lieutenant Westmorland displayed his interest in and awareness of the proceedings within Tailor's Hall in a letter to Henry Dundas on 7 December, the second-to-last day of the convention:

One of the members said he saw no clear reason for distinction between Roman Catholics and Protestants and thought they should demand a perfect equality of the rights and privileges with the Protestants. The flame caught immediately through the whole assembly and, as I am informed, there was an universal cry of perfect liberty and equality with Protestants ... I understand that at first they were satisfied to have it pass through my hands, but upon some unaccountable jealousy, they afterwards resolved to depute five of their body to present it to his majesty and the delegates are to set out tomorrow or the next day.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ National Library of Ireland, *Diary of James Scully*, MS 27, 571.

²⁵⁸ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 233.

²⁵⁹ National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office, Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 - 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Westmorland to Dundas, 7 December 1792].

Although we cannot be certain how the Irish Lord Lieutenant had been 'informed' of these particular details, he was clearly aware of both of the convention's main decisions: to request total emancipation and to send a five-man deputation to Westminster.

Several Irish Protestant supporters and allies also took a keen interest in the events surrounding the Catholic convention. A small group of activists representing the Society of United Irishmen visited Tailor's Hall to offer a resolution of support. This delegation, which included Archibald Hamilton Rowan, Simon Butler and Napper Tandy, unfortunately, was prevented from entering the main assembly hall to address the Catholic delegates. Karen Harvey has stated that the United Irishmen were 'not permitted to address [the convention], but [were] received politely in an antechamber',²⁶⁰ while William Drennan later speculated that the convention had a 'fear of showing any public communication with the United Irishmen in the present stage of the business'.²⁶¹ Although Catholic motives remain unspecified, it is evident that, while the Committee appreciated and welcomed any pro-Catholic support, the act of publicly receiving United Irish representatives was a risk which the Catholic leaders believed that they should not take on the eve of their deputation's departure. The delicate and precarious nature of the Catholic position and the uncertain political atmosphere within Ireland and throughout Western Europe made any affiliation with radicalism extremely dangerous to the Catholic cause. Protestant support and assistance also came from the citizens of Belfast after poor weather and contrary winds in Dublin drove the deputation to embark from Belfast. T. W. Tone, who accompanied the Catholic deputation in a professional capacity as assistant secretary, described their

²⁶⁰ Karen J. Harvey, *The Bellews of Mount Bellew: A Catholic Gentry Family in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, p. 170.

²⁶¹ Jean Agnew (ed.), *The Drennan - McTier Letters, 1776-1793*, vol. i (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1998), p. 444 [William Drennan to Sam and Martha McTier, 10 December 1792].

celebrated arrival in the city on the morning of 12 December. After being greeted by several supporters 'their horses were taken off and they were drawn along with loud acclamations by the people'.²⁶²

Finally, after completing their journey and arriving in London, the deputation was welcomed into Westminster by some of their most important political allies from Ireland and Britain. Henry Grattan, Francis Hutchinson and John P. Curran all remained in England 'to provide [the Catholics] with advice and connections' during their stay.²⁶³ Despite the delegates' refusal to entrust him with their petition, Lord Donoughmore was also there to provide assistance.²⁶⁴ Finally, the Burkes took steps to contribute to the success of the Irish Catholic cause. On 14 December, four days prior to the deputation's arrival, Edmund Burke spoke in the British House of Commons on the validity of the Irish Catholic claims, imploring the government to grant their request for enfranchisement. Similarly, Richard Burke transmitted several letters and memorials to Secretary Dundas arguing the Catholic case, while Edmund Burke wrote an especially powerful essay, which drew distinctions between the Catholic claims and the theories of contemporary radicals. He explained that the Catholics sought the franchise, 'not as a matter of speculative right, not upon general principles of liberty, or as a conclusion from any given premise, either of natural or even constitutional right ... [but as] a protection and a requisite security'.²⁶⁵ Burke believed that it was essential to relieve the Irish Catholics immediately because of the ongoing threats posed to society by radicals and political innovators who 'embrace the doctrines of the day'.²⁶⁶

²⁶² William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 87.

²⁶³ D. Kennedy, 'The Irish Whigs, 1789-1793' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1971), p. 195.

²⁶⁴ Denis Gwynn, *John Keogh*, p. 59.

²⁶⁵ Thomas H. D. Mahoney, *Edmund Burke and Ireland*, p. 207.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

Shortly after arriving at Westminster, the deputation transmitted a very brief letter to Secretary Dundas to inform him of their arrival. Dated 19 December 1792 from 'Graviers Hotel, Jermyn St.', this note simply stated:

We have the honour to inform you that the Catholics of Ireland have delegated us to present their humble petition to our most Gracious Sovereign. We request to know at what time we may be allowed the honour of waiting on you with a copy of this petition, which we wish to be submitted to his Majesty's inspection.²⁶⁷

The letter was signed by Keogh, Byrne, Bellew and Devereux, but did not carry the signature of Sir Thomas French. A plausible explanation for this discrepancy was contained in a letter sent to Christopher Dillon Bellew by his London relative, Christopher Bellew, on 15 December. In addition to expressing the wishes that his letter would 'meet you safe; arrived in London and that we shall soon hear the success of your embassy', Christopher Bellew stated that 'Sir Thomas French arrived in town yesterday and was to sail last night in order to meet you. I hope he may be late'.²⁶⁸ This letter, therefore, clearly indicates that, while Tone and the other four delegates had travelled through Belfast to arrive in London around 18 December, Sir Thomas French was delayed and made the trip by himself, probably joining his associates in London one or two days later. This was confirmed by the appearance of French's signature on a second letter sent by the deputation to Henry Dundas on 20 December, which contained 'for [his] perusal a copy of the signatures affixed to the Petition of the Catholics of Ireland'.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/307 [Deputation to Dundas, 19 December 1792].

²⁶⁸ National Library of Ireland, *Bellews of Mount Bellew Papers*, MS 27, 145 [As mentioned on p. 231, for unknown reasons Bellew had no actual confidence in Sir T. French.].

²⁶⁹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/309 [Deputation to Dundas, 20 December 1792].

During the final days of 1792, the Irish Catholic deputation corresponded and met with Dundas at least twice. The British minister was prompt in inviting the Catholics to his office at Somerset House for a meeting at one o'clock on 20 December and then again on 24 December. Surviving letters indicate that the delegates were obliged to explain the Catholic requests thoroughly and they had also to uphold their direct instructions to present the petition personally. In a letter contained in Tone's diary and dated 20 December 1792, the deputation informed Dundas that 'no measure short of an abolition of all distinctions, between them and their fellow subjects of other religious persuasions would be either just or satisfactory'.²⁷⁰ Similarly, on 27 December they explained to the minister: 'We feel it is our duty, respectfully, to apprise you that on referring to our instructions, we do not conceive ourselves entrusted with any discretion or latitude, but are limited to presenting the petition to our sovereign in person'.²⁷¹ Somehow, Secretary Dundas must have misunderstood this statement, for a mere three days later, on 30 December, the Irish Catholics were again forced to reiterate: 'we lament our not having been fortunate enough at the different interviews with which you honoured us to explain sufficiently that our instructions were to lay the petition before his majesty in person'.²⁷² Although Dundas must have given his approval to the petition, despite its general request for total emancipation, he clearly intended for either himself or some other associate to present the Irish Catholic petition to the king. The stubborn adherence of the deputation to the specific instructions given to them by the convention, however, ensured that on the appointed day, the petition was presented directly by them to His Majesty, the king.

²⁷⁰ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 238.

²⁷¹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/323 [Deputation to Dundas, 27 December 1792] This letter is incorrectly dated '29 December' in Tone's Diary.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, [30 December 1792].

In addition to the instructions to present the petition personally and to apprise British ministers of the Irish Catholic request for total emancipation, the five-man deputation had been directed by the convention to find an alternative person to present them to the king if the British ministers postponed the royal presentation and also to 'use all possible expedition'.²⁷³ These specific instructions caused the delegates particular aggravation, as they were forced to wait several days before meeting their sovereign. On 27 December, the deputation respectfully observed to Secretary Dundas: 'we presumed to entertain a hope that we should, by this, have been favoured with your determination as to the time when we should wait upon you to learn the proper mode and season of presenting to his Majesty the humble petition'.²⁷⁴ In this same letter, they bluntly asserted that, 'we are responsible to those by whom we are deputed for using all due diligence'.²⁷⁵ Dundas responded the following day by simply informing the Catholics that 'the next levee is next Wednesday'.²⁷⁶ Upon receiving this long-awaited information, the deputation wrote back to Dundas to request his personal assistance:

As individuals, Sir, we feel that we are too humble to have any claim to your protection, but as delegated by the Catholics of Ireland in an important occasion, we humbly request to know ... whether we may hope for the honour of being introduced by you to the presence of our sovereign on Wednesday.²⁷⁷

The five Irish Catholic representatives deputed to Westminster by the Catholic convention must have been ecstatic upon receiving the minister's official answer the

²⁷³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 237.

²⁷⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/323 [27 December 1792].

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/325 [Dundas to Deputation, 28 December 1792].

²⁷⁷ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/327 [Deputation to Dundas, 30 December 1792].

following day, the very last day of 1792: 'Dundas has agreed to meet you at St. James on Wednesday at one o'clock to present you'.²⁷⁸

The Catholic delegates had been directed by the convention to 'make a superb appearance'.²⁷⁹ As the appointed day approached, therefore, the deputation made every possible effort to follow this instruction and to represent the Catholics of Ireland with dignity. While staying in London, the deputation had enjoyed the hospitality of certain aristocratic hosts, including Lord Rawdon, who had entertained the Irish Catholics 'with magnificence'.²⁸⁰ Similarly, when attending the king's levee on 2 January 1793, the Catholic delegates rose to the occasion, donning magnificent suits and wigs, and presenting themselves with style alongside the other subjects and royal courtiers. Tone called the deputation's appearance 'splendid' and he explained that, 'they met with, what is called in the language of the courts, a most gracious reception, that is His majesty was pleased to say a few words to each of the delegates in his turn'.²⁸¹ Another eyewitness described 'seeing Keogh and the other delegates admitted to the first court in Europe, going in great state and making a splendid appearance'.²⁸² This observer stated that:

Keogh in particular was prodigiously fine, he wore silk stockings and a round sharp-buckled tie-wig with two rows of hard curls that were extremely well powdered. He was highly delighted with his position - looked very grand and very vain. He seemed to soar above all those he had left in Ireland, but when he returned home, he had too much good sense to preserve his grandeur. He laid aside his court wig and his court manner and only retained his Irish feelings.²⁸³

²⁷⁸ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/329 [Evan Nepean to Edward Byrne, 31 December 1792].

²⁷⁹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 233.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, i, 88.

²⁸¹ Frank MacDermott, *Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. 110.

²⁸² Denis Gwynn, *John Keogh*, pp. 59-60.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

In accordance with the pre-arranged plans, the Irish Catholic deputation was introduced by Henry Dundas at the royal levee of 2 January. They presented King George III with their petition and the affixed signatures of all 234 delegates to the Catholic Convention.²⁸⁴ Unlike any of the previous Catholic petitions intended for the Irish parliament, however, the Irish Catholic petition of 1793 contained a thorough and comparatively detailed list of grievances and penal disadvantages. These included the Irish Catholic exclusions from the University of Dublin, civil and military offices, and the franchise of all guilds and corporations, a grievance which resulted in the law 'giving an advantage over us to those in whom they are exclusively vested, they establish ... a species of monopoly uniformly operating in our disfavour'.²⁸⁵ The petition of 1793 also cited the opportunity for any Irish Catholic child to conform to the established church and, thereby, to obtain his father's entire estate as well as the Catholic prohibitions from founding schools or keeping weapons, 'whereby we are exposed to the violence of burglary, robbery and assassination'.²⁸⁶ Finally, the petition included the Irish Catholic exclusions from Grand Juries, petty juries and the elective franchise. In addition to informing the king about the regular phenomena of ejections of Irish Catholic peasants at the expiration of their leases, 'to make room for Protestant freeholders, who, by their votes, may contribute to the weight and importance of their landlords',²⁸⁷ the petition employed rational political reasoning to defend the Catholic request for enfranchisement:

²⁸⁴ *Petition of the Catholics of Ireland*, This number includes the two Catholic clergymen who signed the petition.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

Your faithful subjects are, thereby, taxed where they are not represented, actually or virtually, and bound by laws in the framing of which they have no power to give or withhold their assent ... [This] is not an evil merely speculative, but is attended with great distress to all ranks and, in many instances, with the total ruin and destruction of the lower orders of your Majesty's faithful and loyal subjects.²⁸⁸

With the successful completion of their appointed mission, the Catholic deputation made preparations to depart Westminster and return to Dublin. They held one final meeting with Henry Dundas to bid farewell and to learn whether he would support their request for relief. Tone described how the Irish Catholic delegates tried to use this final opportunity to impress Dundas with the essential necessity for immediate relief legislation: 'he was given to understand ... that the peace of Ireland, or ... the submission of the Catholics, depended on the measures which government might adopt on their behalf'.²⁸⁹ Unfortunately, however, Dundas maintained his familiar reserve and again refused to divulge any specific information or offer any guarantees:

Yet the cool and guarded temper of the minister was not to be disturbed and though he heard [the Catholics] with attention and, apparently, at times, with emotion, he was not to be driven from the diplomatic caution behind which he had carefully entrenched himself.²⁹⁰

He did, unexpectedly, provide the Irish Catholics with some reassurance. He was able to inform them that because the king had been made aware of their 'loyalty and attachment to the principles of the Constitution', unlike the preceding year they would be 'recommended in the speech from the throne at the opening of the impending session [of the Irish Parliament]'.²⁹¹ Also, in a record of the *Substance of a Communication* held between Dundas and the deputation, instructions were contained from the king commanding Dundas to transmit a copy of the Irish Catholic petition to

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 89.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin and to 'recommend it to the attention of his servants in Ireland'.²⁹²

This welcome news provided the Irish Catholic deputation with good cause for optimism and, as a result, they departed Westminster with high expectations. Certain members of the deputation were dispatched immediately in order to return to Dublin to bring the Catholic sub-committee up-to-date with what had transpired at Westminster. James Edward Devereux decided to remain at Westminster for several weeks, where he was able to obtain intelligence and act as an unofficial representative of the Irish Catholic Committee. Finally, the remaining Irish Catholic delegates made their way back to Ireland gradually, conclusively arriving in Dublin by 21 January 1793 at the latest.²⁹³ Most likely, however, with the exception of Devereux, the Irish Catholic deputation reached Dublin in time for the opening of the Irish Parliament on 10 January 1793, with its anticipated reward for their efforts, a bill for Irish Catholic relief.

²⁹² The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/42/57-58 [7 January 1793].

²⁹³ Surviving evidence has placed Christopher Dillon Bellew in Dublin by 14 January (The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/46/13 [15 January 1793, '*Extract of a Letter from Hobart to Evan Nepean*']) and the other three delegates no later than 21 January (William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 240).

CHAPTER SIX

The Catholic Relief Act of 1793: Impact and Legacy

The Irish Catholic Relief Act of 1793 resulted directly from the successful efforts of the Catholic Committee. By holding a representative convention and then presenting a detailed petition, they demonstrated their determination to achieve greater relief and their refusal to accept the limited relief granted by Hercules Langrishe's act of 1792. By building themselves into a powerful political force, the Catholics of Ireland compelled the British government and Irish administration to consider their demands seriously and to respond to their request for relief promptly. Following the success of the Irish Catholic deputation, which had helped to secure the support of the Westminster government, a bill for further relief became a political reality. With the intended legislation placed under the control of the Irish administration and Irish parliament and with the precise forms of relief remaining unspecified, however, the Catholic Committee still had to maintain a united, peaceful and loyal front in January 1793.

While the five-man deputation had been preparing to attend the royal leveé at Westminster to present the Irish Catholic petition, the sub-committee in Dublin continued its activity in advance of the opening of the Irish parliament. Letters and addresses were transmitted to the Catholics of Ireland at the start of January. On 2 January an address was drafted which advised the Catholics to avoid engaging in 'violence derogatory to their unspotted character of loyalty and obedience to the laws' and, also, in order to prevent the appearance of disorder prior to the opening of parliament, to stop attending 'meetings convened for the purpose of expressing their

allegiance'.¹ Additionally, in the January address a reference was made to the ongoing activities of the Catholic Defenders. The sub-committee stated that they were 'grieved to hear of the success of designing men in agitating the minds of lower orders of their persuasion ... and filling them with apprehensions of danger from their protestant brethren'.² The sub-committee then urged the cessation of hostilities and reiterated their strong belief that 'all animosity between Protestants and Catholics should cease'.³ Finally, the sub-committee in Dublin concluded its January address by voicing the optimism and hopes of Catholic Ireland:

The world will now see their conduct and unquestionably their king and country will reward it, for he is a just and gracious king and Protestants must at last see that nothing but union at home ... can guard the island from domestic or foreign foes.⁴

Three days later, on 5 January, the sub-committee communicated with the leading Catholic activists throughout the country, former delegates to the convention who, afterwards, had been designated as members of the extended General Committee of the Catholics of Ireland. These former delegates were instructed to update the Catholics of their region on the activities of the Catholic deputation to Westminster, which had informed their Dublin associates on 31 December 1792 that the Catholic petition would be presented on 2 January 1793. Although the accounts received by the sub-committee were described as 'not conclusive', they felt confident enough to claim that '[they] are such as lead us to hope a favourable issue'.⁵

¹ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 315. In the *Dairy of James Scully*, MS 27, 571, a County Tipperary Meeting is mentioned in December 1792: 'the 27th inhabitants in and about Tipperary met in Tipperary and testified their approbation of the emancipation of the Catholics.'

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/42/49-51 [5 January 1793].

In addition to these attempts at extending control over certain Catholic groups and maintaining communications between the sub-committee and provincial Irish Catholic activists, the Catholic Committee reopened talks with the Irish administration in January 1793. W. J. MacNeven described that while some members of the deputation were still at Westminster:

The sub-committee, apprehending from private circumstances that it was advisable to make the extent of their wishes fully known to the Irish administration, deputed some of their body to wait on Major Hobart and acquaint him that the object and expectations of the Catholics were the entire repeal of the popery laws.⁶

MacNeven then added that several days later it was considered necessary to hold a second interview with 'the same declaration reduced to writing'.⁷ Although MacNeven failed to include the exact dates of these interviews, in a government document entitled *Extract of a Letter from the Right Honorable Robert Hobart to Evan Nepean, Esq.*, which was dated 15 January 1793, the Chief Secretary informed his correspondent that 'Mr. Bellew ... being recently returned from London, called upon me yesterday and delivered me a paper ... which he conceived to be the substance of what had passed between Mr. Dundas and [the deputation] on Monday'.⁸ According to Hobart's letter, at this meeting Christopher Dillon Bellew also shared his opinion with the Chief Secretary 'that nothing short of being on a footing with the other dissenters would satisfy the Roman Catholics'.⁹ The Catholic Committee and the Irish administration were, therefore, engaged in communications by 14 January, although they may have begun at an earlier date.

⁶ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 47.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/46/13 [*Extract of a Letter from the Rt. Hon. Robert Hobart to Evan Nepean, Esq.*].

⁹ Ibid.

At the same time that the Irish Catholic Committee was seeking to promote its cause in Dublin, the Irish parliament opened its doors on 10 January 1793. Following the instructions given by British ministers and, unlike the opening of parliament in 1792, in 1793 the Irish Lord Lieutenant, Lord Westmorland, mentioned the cause of the Irish Catholics in his opening speech: 'his majesty trusts that the situation of his majesty's Catholic subjects will engage your serious attention and in the consideration of this subject he relies on the wisdom and liberality of his parliament'.¹⁰ Although Westmorland's speech did not recommend any specific form of relief, it did express the king's desire to have the situation considered. In contrast to the events in the Irish parliament of 1792, therefore, the Irish Catholic issue was openly introduced as a government measure and not merely as a proposal by an independent MP, an arrangement which may have strongly affected the legislation's reception.

Although the Catholic issue was contained in Westmorland's opening speech, it was not discussed significantly until February 1793. On 15 January, Chief Secretary Hobart moved that 'at an early day' the House would 'take into consideration that part of the Lord Lieutenant's speech, where he recommends the parliament to take into consideration the situation of the Roman Catholics of the kingdom'.¹¹ Initially, the Irish Commons had settled on 1 February to discuss the subject, after returning from an adjournment which had lasted from 17 to 27 January. This date was pushed back slightly, however, after Hobart requested a 'further delay on [the] Catholic matter, please, 'til next Monday', 4 February 1793.¹²

During the month of January, the most significant statements made in the Irish parliament on the Catholic issue came from Irish Whigs. On 14 January, Ponsonby

¹⁰ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 13 (Dublin, 1784-95), 3 [Lord Lieutenant Westmorland, 10 January 1793].

¹¹ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 13 (Dublin, 1784-95), 64.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

declared that the Catholics 'are Irish ... and I am Irish; and with the prosperity or adversity of this, our common country, will I rise or fall'.¹³ Also, Henry Grattan made the first of his important speeches advocating Catholic rights on 10 January, shortly after Westmorland's opening speech. Grattan described the Irish Catholics as 'that oppressed part of his majesty's subjects'.¹⁴ He then went on to accuse the Irish administration of a string of offences involving its treatment of the Irish Catholics, which included detaching Catholic gentry and clergy from the common people; inviting a paper war; publishing 'personal invectives against respectable Catholics'; and interfering with the county Grand Juries.¹⁵ Echoing the previously expressed opinions of Richard Burke and the Catholic Committee, Grattan claimed that Dublin Castle:

Took the lead in fomenting a religious war, they began it, they acted in the mongrel capacity of country gentlemen and ministers, they acted against the Catholics as country gentlemen and encouraged the Protestants as ministers ... To the country gentlemen they say, 'will you bear that these men shall get the Elective Franchise?' and to the British minister, 'you see these country gentlemen'; and the consequences of this conduct is that the Irish ministry becomes parties against the people and have a personal and country interest to exclude them; not as Catholics but as enemies.¹⁶

The parliamentary adjournment and the delay in introducing the intended Catholic relief legislation provided the Catholic Committee with an opportunity to continue their out-of-doors discussions with Chief Secretary Hobart. T. W. Tone's Diary contains a record of a crucial interview on 21 January and the subsequent sub-committee meetings, which were held regularly throughout early February. The unfortunate turn-of-events, which began with this interview on 21 January between

¹³ Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁴ Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, vol. ii (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000), p. 20 [10 January 1793].

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 20-22.

¹⁶ Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, ii, pp. 22-23.

Hobart, Keogh, Byrne, French and McDonnell, was dramatically described both by Tone and by W. J. MacNeven. Tone explained that, although the sub-committee members had been despatched 'to Hobart to apprise him that nothing short of unlimited emancipation will satisfy the Catholics', they returned one hour later 'extremely dissatisfied with each other'.¹⁷ Tone went on to state that:

After divers mutual recriminations; it appears by the confession of all parties that, so far from discharging their commission, they had done directly the reverse; for the result of their conversation with the secretary was that he had declared explicitly against the whole measure and they had given him reason, in consequence, to think that the Catholics would acquiesce contentedly in a half one.¹⁸

Tone then added 'sad, sad! ... As for merchants, I begin to see they are no great hands at revolutions'.¹⁹

In MacNeven's retrospective, he attempted to recreate the conversation which had passed between Keogh and Hobart on 21 January 1793. MacNeven claimed that Hobart had asked, 'Did [you] not think that if government went for elective franchise and the repeal of the Catholic laws relating to juries ... enough would be done?'²⁰ To which Keogh allegedly replied, 'as one of the deputation ... it would not content the Catholics and that, there, he had no right to deliver any private opinion'.²¹ Hobart, in turn, probed further, asking, 'But it is your private opinion I request to know'.²² According to MacNeven, Keogh then responded 'if I was to give my private opinion, I

¹⁷ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 240-1.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 47.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

should say they are substantial benefits', which led the Chief Secretary to state bluntly, 'it is not in government's power to grant more'.²³

Although these two accounts correspond on all major points, Tone's Diary implicated all of the sub-committee members present, while MacNeven laid the weight of blame specifically on John Keogh. The immediate results of this tragic interview were attempts by the sub-committee to speak with Hobart again to amend their earlier advice and the birth of almost immediate dissension within the Irish Catholic sub-committee. Ultimately, the 21 January meeting also affected the proposed Catholic relief legislation itself and helped to taint what should have been a major victory for the Catholic cause.²⁴

Tone's Diary contains evidence of the breakdown which began to occur within the sub-committee at the end of January 1793 as the group started to split into two halves. The first half advocated total emancipation and maintained a strong stance. These members included Tone, McCormick, French, and John Sweetman of Dublin, a cousin to J. E. Devereux. The other half of the sub-committee accepted the need for compromise and, therefore, considered more limited relief to be an acceptable alternative. These more conciliatory members included both Keogh and Byrne. One day after the disastrous meeting with Hobart on 21 January, the more resolute sub-committee members assembled to form what Tone described as 'a council of war'. They all agreed that the Catholic cause had indeed suffered a setback and that a 'sneaking spirit of compromise ... may be fatal'.²⁵ According to Tone, on 24 January Sir Thomas French spoke out against a 'lukewarm spirit', which he believed to have

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Although Hobart's exact motives at the meeting of 21 January remain unclear, they may have included an intentional attempt by government to weaken or to split the Irish Catholic Committee.

²⁵ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 241.

developed within certain sub-committee members over the preceding few days.²⁶ Finally, between 26 and 31 January, Tone cited infighting, panic, and timidity on the part of certain sub-committee members and an overall 'sad decay in spirit'.²⁷

During this period, the Catholic sub-committee primarily disputed two important items, a proposed address to the nation and the Catholic Committee's petition to the Irish parliament. The address was prepared by John Sweetman and then amended by Tone to include a direct attack at Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon, who had publicly denied Irish Catholic suffering in a speech on 10 January 1793:

[Catholic leaders] assert that at the expiration of their leases, multitudes of the Catholic tenantry are expelled from their farms to make room for Protestant freeholders ... I can safely say that this statement is utterly unfounded ... Their object seems to be not so much to obtain a redress of any solid grievances ... as to mislead the people of another country and to incite the Catholics of Ireland to discontent and tumult.²⁸

At a meeting of the sub-committee on 24 January, however, several members asserted that it was beneath their dignity to enter into such a dispute and that the amended address constituted an attack on the privileges of parliament. Ultimately, the address was referred to the Committee's friends in parliament and later completely suppressed.

Similarly, the opening paragraph of the Committee's petition to parliament provoked disagreement after John Keogh supported certain changes. Keogh advocated the removal of any specific mention of offensive penal legislation and its replacement with a more general request for relief in order to ensure that Chief Secretary Hobart would present the petition. On 24 January this proposal was defeated by the sub-committee and Tone was pleased to report that Keogh 'is losing ground fast and if he

²⁶ Ibid., i, 242.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 244.

²⁸ *Substance of the Speech of the Right Honorable Lord Fitzgibbon, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, on the 10th January, 1793, Respecting the Catholic Delegates, and the Popery Laws of Ireland* (Dublin, 1793), pp. 9-10 & p. 12.

does not take care, he will go down totally'.²⁹ Approximately three days later, however, certain sub-committee members withdrew their opposition and permitted Keogh's amendments, leading Tone to decry their loss of determination and nearly to fall out with his former allies.

An additional factor which contributed to the dissention and mounting mistrust among sub-committee members involved important information supplied by J. E. Devereux. Devereux, who was still in London, wrote to Tone at the end of January in response to a letter enquiring about events while the Catholic deputation had been at Westminster. Devereux told the sub-committee in Dublin that, while he and the other Catholic delegates had been waiting to meet with Dundas for their final interview, the undersecretary, Evan Nepean, had summoned Keogh privately and 'kept him forty minutes in his office'.³⁰ This report was received by the sub-committee before the end of the month and immediately led to accusations of treachery and Keogh's secret consent to limited relief. Tone's Diary contains references to arguments held between Keogh and other sub-committee members, including himself and John Sweetman, who had been driven to defend his cousin's honesty. These recriminations had a lasting effect on the Irish Catholic Committee and particularly John Keogh, who was later made into a scapegoat and had to tolerate protracted slander and suspicion for several months.

In the midst of this confused infighting the proposed Catholic Relief bill and the issue of Irish Catholic rights were introduced and debated in the Irish House of Commons. On 31 January, the sub-committee sent Hobart their amended Catholic petition, stating that they had followed his advice to alter the introduction and

²⁹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 243.

³⁰ Frank MacDermott, *Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. xii.

acknowledging 'that our opponents might draw arguments against us'.³¹ In contrast to events in 1792, therefore, this adapted petition was presented to the Irish parliament by the Chief Secretary on 4 February 1793. It included the signatures of all important Catholic activists and clerical leaders including Archbishops Troy and Bray and, because it contained no specific requests, it left the Irish House of Commons free to determine the precise forms of relief to be granted. The petition only vaguely asserted, 'that the petitioners are subject to a variety of severe and oppressive laws, inflicting on them inabilities and disqualifications unknown to any other description of his Majesty's subjects'.³² Immediately after ordering the Committee's petition to lie on the table, Hobart proceeded to introduce the administration's intended Catholic relief plan to the Irish MPs. Prefacing his statements with a reassuring disclaimer, he explained:

I am aware that what I have to propose to the house respecting those [Catholic] people tonight might not possibly meet the general concurrence of gentlemen. It is not my wish or my intention to press anything upon the House that would not meet general approbation; it is my wish to acquiesce in whatever gentlemen may think the interest of the country.³³

The first relief measure described by Hobart on 4 February granted to Irish Catholics 'the right of voting at elections for members of Parliament'.³⁴ He boldly defended an 'unlimited extension of this franchise', partly on the grounds that it would pose no danger to Protestants and also to prevent the formation of 'a sore place in the Roman Catholic mind'.³⁵ Ultimately, he also proposed extending this right to include Roman Catholics in cities and corporate towns at elections for town magistrates. The second measure permitted Catholics to serve on grand and petty juries freely, while

³¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 251 [sub-committee to Hobart, 31 January 1793].

³² Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, ii, 57 [4 February 1793].

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 58 [4 February 1793].

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

three further items enabled the removal of overlooked and vestigial property restrictions; the admission of Catholics to military commissions; and the opening of civil offices, 'but in this instance I will suggest the propriety of necessary limitations'.³⁶ Finally, the Chief Secretary stated, 'the laws which prevent [Catholics] from carrying arms should be so far repealed as to persons possessing a certain degree of property', but, he was very careful to add 'by no means so as to put arms into the hands of the lower order of the people'.³⁷

Hobart's Catholic relief plan met with no significant opposition on 4 February and certain Irish MPs even expressed a desire to extend the relief further. As a result, therefore, when the Irish House of Commons voted on whether to grant leave to bring in the bill, the proposal passed easily 'with two dissenting voices only'.³⁸ Due to delays caused by the extreme difficulties of 'the law officers in framing the bill',³⁹ the first reading occurred on 18 February and was promptly followed by the decisions to hold a second reading on 22 February and to have the bill printed. The most significant debates in the Irish House of Commons on the government's Catholic Relief bill did not occur until the end of the month between Friday, 22 February and Wednesday, 27 February.

One of the particular highlights of these debates involved the statement made by pro-Catholic MP for Dungannon, George Knox, that 'Roman Catholics should be permitted to hold seats in Parliament'.⁴⁰ Knox had previously explained his tactical motives for taking this action:

³⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

³⁹ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 13 (Dublin, 1784-95), p. 195 [Hobart, 15 February 1793].

⁴⁰ Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, ii, 196.

I ought myself to bring forward the measure of complete emancipation, as it was evident that opposition, though unwilling to move in it, yet wished to get popularity ... and by leaving the question open, to keep the country in a flame ... I gave as a reason for bringing the subject forward that so many persons had the night before expressed opinions of that nature, that I thought it became necessary that the opinions of the Parliament should be decidedly known on the subject, otherwise the minds of the people would still continue as last summer in a state of hurt and uncertainty.⁴¹

A debate was held on this proposed clause on 25 February, in which liberal-minded MPs, such as Egan, Curran, Hutchinson and O'Neil, all voiced their support. The Irish government in the person of Chief Secretary Hobart, however, opposed Knox's suggestion and when the Irish Commons finally voted on the measure in the early morning hours it was defeated by 163 to 69 votes.

Overall, the parliamentary debates of 1793 on the government's Catholic Relief bill were recognised for their general sense of toleration and good will. Lecky has observed that 'it is a simple fact that this great and complicated measure ... passed through Parliament almost completely unmodified, and without even any serious opposition' and, also, that it 'was carried without the smallest difficulty in 1793'.⁴² With the notable exception of the Speaker of the House, John Foster, who defended the county Grand Juries; denied Catholic claims of extreme suffering; and described the Catholic Committee's Circular of May 1792 as 'full of sedition', very few MPs spoke in opposition to Catholic claims.⁴³ Hobart insisted that 'if we can confide in [Catholics] – as I do most perfectly – let us grant with generosity and without

⁴¹ Anthony Malcolmson, *Catholic Emancipation, 1793-1829* (Belfast: Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, 1976) [insert, George Knox to Marquess of Abercorn, 6 February 1793].

⁴² W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 253 & p. 241. In strong contrast to Lecky, Marianne Elliott has claimed that the Irish government experienced a massive 'parliamentary revolt' over the proposed measure in January 1793, which prevented it from effectively managing 'its own supporters in the Irish Parliament'. Marianne Elliott, *Theobald Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 203.

⁴³ Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, ii, 307 [John Foster, 27 February 1793].

limitation'.⁴⁴ MP Maxwell even remarked on 'the vanity of both sides of the House in bidding against each other for Catholic favour'.⁴⁵ This liberal approach, therefore, enabled the legislation to pass through the Commons with little opposition. After the insertion of minor amendments at the start of March, including an unexpected extension of the right to hold the revenue office of Chief Commissioner, because 'the greater part of the wealthy Catholics in this country were men who had amassed their property by trade' and, therefore, 'were the most fit for presiding over the revenue',⁴⁶ the relief bill was transmitted to the Irish House of Lords.

Although the bill was not officially opposed in the Irish House of Lords, on 13 March 1793 Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon famously voiced his personal displeasure over this measure of Catholic Relief as well as his frustration with the efforts of the Irish Whigs to 'foment jealousies and disunion between this country and Great Britain'.⁴⁷ FitzGibbon feared the changes to Irish politics that the new legislation would eventually engender, describing the events of 1792 and the resulting passage of Catholic relief as 'a precedent fatal to all legitimate authority'.⁴⁸ Ultimately, however, these complaints did not prevent the legislation from passing out of the Irish House of Lords, receiving royal assent, and, finally, becoming law on 9 April 1793. Although this action was received graciously by the Catholics of Ireland and the Catholic Committee, which appreciated the Irish government's assistance, as Henry Grattan later observed to Edmund Burke, 'by [FitzGibbon's] speech he diminished the reconciliatory

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 295.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 302 [27 February 1793].

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 351 [MP Annesley, 4 March 1793].

⁴⁷ *The Speech of the Right Honorable John Lord Baron FitzGibbon, Lord High Chancellor of Ireland, Delivered in the House of Peers on the Second Reading of the Bill for the Relief of His Majesty's Roman Catholic Subjects, 13 March 1793* (Dublin, [1793]), p. 13.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

effect of the bill by thus informing the Catholic that though the Irish law ceased to be their enemy – the Irish minister continued to be so'.⁴⁹

There may have been multiple reasons for the comparatively easy passage of the Catholic relief legislation. During the debates of 1793, Irish MPs repeatedly referred to a change in the political climate of Ireland. For example, Chief Secretary Hobart drew the Commons' attention to 'the circumstances of the present time' that had shifted since the parliamentary session of 1792: 'it is now evident to every man that the sentiments of the country on this subject had materially altered since that time'.⁵⁰ Similarly, Sir Laurence Parsons referred to an 'important moment' by correctly observing that:

Public expectation is wound to the highest, we must give what will gratify; but not destroy; an error now may bring years of calamity. You have many things to fear; the exorbitance of popular desire, the reluctance of ministers to change, the divisions which subsist among yourselves.⁵¹

Even Richard Burke remarked to Henry Grattan about the 'perilous moment' of Irish politics in early 1793.⁵² These references may have been emphasising domestic changes within Ireland or they may have been referring to the vastly different international conditions, which had led to spreading conflict on the continent and the outbreak of war with republican France. Irish politicians had been able to observe the united strength of the Irish Catholics throughout 1792 and came to appreciate the urgency of securing Catholic loyalty and attachment to the royal government during a time of such uncertainty.

⁴⁹ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 364 [25, 26 March 1793].

⁵⁰ Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, ii, 59 [4 February 1793].

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 159 [18 February 1793].

⁵² P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 351 [28 February 1793].

In certain cases this desire to obtain Catholic support led to competition within the Irish parliament. As Maxwell had recognised, in 1793 parliamentary parties were 'bidding against each other for Catholic favour'.⁵³ This rivalry may also have been extended to the Irish administration, which sought to remove imputations of being anti-Catholic. A. P. W. Malcomson has stated that the concessions contained in the Catholic relief legislation were 'less damaging to the [Protestant] ascendancy than a situation in which the Catholics continued to regard the Irish parliament as their enemy and the British government as their only friend'.⁵⁴ A general desire to attach the Catholics of Ireland to Dublin Castle or to particular political parties, therefore, may have been partly behind the legislation's easy passage.

Additionally, the strong backing given by Westminster may have had a powerful influence on the Irish parliament alongside the knowledge that Catholic relief had been endorsed by the king. Henry Dundas had implored Irish ministers to pass Catholic relief legislation more comprehensive than Langrishe's Act of 1792 and MP Hardy expressed his great 'satisfaction' to learn 'that his majesty had given it in charge to the Lord Lieutenant to recommend to parliament a reconsideration of the Roman Catholic question'.⁵⁵ As an official measure recommended in Westmorland's introductory speech from the throne, therefore, the legislation may have seemed more acceptable to Irish MPs accustomed to vote in favour of government sponsored bills. The passage of Catholic relief in 1793 may have been ensured by the Irish administration's adoption of the Catholic cause and its effective control of the Irish parliament, which could generally be lead to support royal measures, a situation frequently recognised and disparaged by the Irish Whig party.

⁵³ Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, ii, 302 [27 February 1793].

⁵⁴ A. P. W. Malcomson, *John Foster: The Politics of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy*, p. 354.

⁵⁵ Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, ii, 27 [10 January 1793].

Finally, the campaign of the Irish Catholic Committee contributed to the success of relief legislation in 1793. Pro-Catholic MPs in the Irish Parliament were able to refer to the significant events of 1792 as justification for rewarding Catholic relief. For example, MP Pery stated his reason for entertaining a 'favourable opinion' of the Roman Catholics was 'their convention, which conduct was, in his mind, peculiarly discreet and laudable'.⁵⁶ Also, Francis Hutchinson described the Committee's activities as having 'a regard to constitutional forms and a solicitous desire to preserve inviolate the public tranquillity'.⁵⁷ These Irish MPs referred to Catholic Committee publications to support their arguments including the May 1792 circular, which recommended 'a peaceable demeanour and obedience to the laws',⁵⁸ and *The Declaration Adopted by the General Committee, March 17, 1792*, 'by which [the Catholics] disavowed all those opinions and [religious] doctrines inimical to good order and government'.⁵⁹ Even the Chief Secretary chose to employ similar claims to defend the government's official stance:

The conduct of the Roman Catholics has proved that they were perfectly attached to the Constitution and, at this particular period, every man who was attached to the Constitution should receive encouragement from this house.⁶⁰

The efforts of the Catholic Committee in seeking to sway public opinion through the influence of printed propaganda and peaceful measures, therefore, partly succeeded in reassuring and calming certain Irish MPs.

An unexpected second benefit of the Catholic campaign of 1792, however, came in the form of increased apprehension by other Irish MPs. In strong contrast to

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 294 [27 February 1793].

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 335 [27 February 1793].

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 294 [Pery, 27 February 1793].

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 335 [Hutchinson, 27 February 1793].

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 335 [27 February 1793].

historical precedent, these MPs were forced to acknowledge the political strength and national unity of the Catholics of Ireland in 1792. The success of the Catholic Committee in holding nationwide elections and in convening a 234-man Catholic convention in Dublin, drove Irish legislators to respect and fear the Irish Catholics, who suddenly constituted a powerful presence on the Irish political landscape. This new concern was displayed by MP John O'Neil, who stated that 'formerly the smallest favour would have been received with gratitude such was the humbled state of the Catholic mind, but now they begin to feel their own consequence', and also by Hutchinson, who used the metaphor of a powerful 'current, which if opposed would sweep with it everything that was ancient and valuable in the Constitution'.⁶¹ These Irish legislators could no longer ignore Catholic requests or placate Catholic activists with insubstantial relief.

Overall, therefore, although the royal government's endorsement and support for Catholic relief was essential and political considerations in Ireland and abroad gave an increased urgency to the need to conciliate the Irish Catholics and secure their loyalty, neither of these concerns would have developed without the Catholic Committee's campaign of 1792. By refusing humbly to accept the limited provisions of Langrishe's Act and then effectively demonstrating the emergence of Catholic political power, the Committee forced the Irish Parliament to honour Catholic requests and to grant the desired relief in 1793. MP Knox listed some of the numerous concerns which drove the Irish legislators of 1793, vaguely alluding to the newly acquired importance of the Catholics of Ireland which underpinned everything:

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 270-272 [25 February 1793].

The causes of the change seem to be these: the justice of the case and the shame of being defeated in an argument; the apprehension of not being supported by England; the danger of that support since at best it must be a military one; the decay of public credit; distrust of the present government; and above all, the fear of driving so large and powerful a body into the arms of the levellers – a danger which I know not to be chimerical.⁶²

While these extraordinary events were occurring within the Irish parliament, out-of-doors the Catholic Committee kept closely informed of proceedings. After Hobart had presented the Catholic petition and introduced the intended legislation on 4 February, the sub-committee was forced to respond to the bill's failure to grant total emancipation. T. W. Tone reported tremendous dissension and frustration within the sub-committee, which had split into two camps each side fighting for control over proceedings. According to Tone, seven members of the sub-committee attempted to assert their authority, wishing to communicate to Hobart their consent to the government's bill. Tone sarcastically referred to this group, which included Keogh, Byrne, MacDonnell, O'Brien, Bellew, French, and Thomas Fitzgerald, as the 'Septemviri'. Tone objected to the 'Septemviri' believing that they were, 'a delegation of the whole power of the Catholic body to seven men who have no definite instructions, who are not bound to report their proceedings, and who have no responsibility'.⁶³ Although Tone, McCormick and John Sweetman openly opposed this party and sought to remove their influence, as well as preventing them from accepting Hobart's bill, after four days of manoeuvring they merely succeeded in delaying the inevitable, a vote in favour of acquiescence.

On 8 February, after failing to receive confirmation, Chief Secretary Hobart communicated with the sub-committee to urge a reply, explaining:

⁶² Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830*, pp. 160-1 [Knox to Abercorn, 13 December 1792].

⁶³ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 247-8 [5 February 1793].

That nothing could be done in the business of the bill for the relief of the Catholics unless he should be enabled to say that they would be satisfied with the measures at present intended ... that the public mind should not be irritated in the manner it has been.⁶⁴

This prompted immediate discussion within the sub-committee. The members who supported accepting Hobart's terms believed that 'the people out-of-doors would disavow us, if we were, after bringing the question thus far prosperously, now to refuse purchasing the present bill at so cheap a price'.⁶⁵ This party argued that accepting the present legislation would not preclude further requests for emancipation in the future and that the benefits would outweigh any losses as few Catholics 'would suffer by what was withheld'.⁶⁶ Most importantly, however, they feared that the possible consequence of their refusal might involve the start of armed conflict.

In contrast, the sub-committee members who advocated a rejection of Hobart's terms claimed that the Catholics of Ireland would support their refusal to accept partial emancipation as they had the backing of Ulster and the crown. This party believed that the government's proposal 'originated with former enemies to intentionally divide and distract them'.⁶⁷ Finally, these activists insisted that only the General Assembly of the Catholics had the authority to sanction the acceptance of legislation, which offered only limited relief:

What had been determined by the general will of the Catholics of Ireland assembled, could not be reversed by the persons appointed to carry that will into execution; that the sub-committee had not even the power of discussing the minister's propositions.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid., i, 249 [8 February 1793].

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 250.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Despite these powerful arguments, however, the sub-committee ultimately voted to accept the government's bill granting Catholics the parliamentary franchise, but not total emancipation. They communicated their approbation to the Chief Secretary through an acknowledgement that, although they could not express 'satisfaction' with the measure, 'but we unofficially admit that it contains substantial relief'.⁶⁹ Hobart was then able to proceed with the legislation in parliament and gave his bill its first reading ten days later. After seeing on 8 February that his efforts to uphold the Catholic convention's pursuit of total emancipation had failed, T. W. Tone woefully wrote in his diary, 'I see the whole measure is decidedly lost'.⁷⁰

The Catholic Relief bill of 1793 obtained royal consent on 9 April.⁷¹ Newspapers throughout Ireland reported that provincial Catholics were pleased and grateful for the removal of penal restrictions. For example in County Clare, the Roman Catholics produced an address 'expressive of their loyalty, of their attachment to the British Constitution, and of their gratitude to his majesty for his late interference in their behalf'.⁷² Similarly, in celebration of the bill's passage, the town of Carlow 'was more universally illuminated than is remembered by its oldest inhabitants', an event which was reported in Athlone as well.⁷³ Finally, the Catholic Bishop of Killaloe distributed a letter to the Catholic clergymen of his county which acknowledged 'the late signal interference of our gracious sovereign King George III' and instructed them:

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 250.

⁷¹ Despite attempts by Irish MPs to introduce amendments on 27 February limiting the parliamentary franchise to Catholics possessing freeholds worth £5, £10 or £20 per year, none of these amendments passed successfully and the Irish Catholics ultimately received the franchise on terms equal to Irish Protestants. More liberal than Burke's conservative proposal of 1791, this plan corresponded with Hobart's proposition and included all Irish Catholics possessing freeholds worth 40 shillings per year. *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 13 (Dublin, 1784-95), 324-360.

⁷² J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 288 [16 April 1793].

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 288-9.

[On] the next lord's day after you receive it, at the hour of divine service, read this our injunction to you and them, to your congregations, requiring them to pray warmly for his Majesty's sacred person and royal family and for the success of his arms by sea and land ... In fine, that every priest, secular and regular of our territory officiating at the altar, in public or private, will during three successive Sundays insert the collect, Pro Rege and Exercitu ejus, &c in conformity to this our mandate.⁷⁴

The Catholic Committee in Dublin, while appreciative, were not completely satisfied by the legislative measure. Following the successful passage of the Catholic Relief Act, the General Assembly reconvened during the month of April to discuss the situation and to formulate response strategies. A publication, produced by the Committee for the purpose of updating its Catholic constituents, indicated that this second assembly met between 16 and 26 April 1793. Inconclusive evidence contained in Tone's Diary, however, suggests the existence of other, unrecorded gatherings starting as early as 10 April. These assemblies were composed of the original Catholic delegates who had been elected to attend the Catholic convention of December 1792 and, therefore, were sizeable gatherings. This April 1793 session of the Catholic Committee was later described as 'stormy in the extreme'.⁷⁵

In addition to attending to more mundane business, such as presenting the official report from the Westminster deputation and examining the expense accounts for the Catholic sub-committee, the General Assembly concentrated on the reasons for receiving only partial emancipation; made decisions about preparing addresses of gratitude; and asked questions about whether to preserve or dissolve the Catholic Committee. Tone reported that intense discussions were held on 16 April regarding the Committee's 'failure' in which Keogh became a scapegoat and government officials were vindicated. Hobart was not held responsible for the limited relief and Secretary of

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998), p. 90 [William T. W. Tone, *Sequel to the Continuation*, 1826].

State Dundas's particular position was described as 'delicate'.⁷⁶ The Committee also debated transmitting addresses of thanks to the king, Lord Lieutenant Westmorland, Chief Secretary Hobart and the Irish parliament. The least controversial options were the addresses intended for the parliament and the king, which ultimately avoided any specific requests for further relief and expressed the Committee's overwhelming gratitude:

Our sincere and heartfelt thanks for the substantial benefits which, through your Majesty's gracious recommendation, we have received ... The disabilities under which we and our ancestors so long laboured have, in a considerable degree, been removed.⁷⁷

Although the address to the king was easily agreed upon, on 17 and 18 April intense discussions were held over transmitting addresses to Irish officials. Two of the Wexford delegates, including the recently returned J. E. Devereux, were specifically instructed by their constituents to object to the address to Lord Lieutenant Westmorland. Similarly, on 17 April, Devereux said about Hobart, 'I blame him for [the] cause of curtailing [the] King's instructions', while MacNeven claimed that the Chief Secretary could have applied more persuasion to influence the 'castle hacks'.⁷⁸ The following day these debates continued as certain individuals opposed the letter of gratitude to Hobart, 'on the ground of containing an inconsistency in thanking Mr. H. for introducing the petition for the whole measure and for his vote, which was against the prayer [of the petition]'.⁷⁹ Ultimately, however, these disagreements among the delegates were settled and the completed copies of addresses and letters of thanks were prepared and transmitted to Dublin Castle on 19 April. The address to the Lord

⁷⁶ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 255-6.

⁷⁷ *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 1 ['Address to the King's Most Excellent Majesty'].

⁷⁸ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 259.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, i, 262.

Lieutenant simply contained the Catholic Committee's assurance that in the future they would 'preserve the same attachment to the principles of our excellent Constitution'.⁸⁰

At this point in the assembly, after most of the essential business had been completed, the Catholic Committee also took into consideration whether 'it would be wise and prudent to dissolve'.⁸¹ According to Tone's record, the discussions held on 24 April quickly turned to the issue of parliamentary reform as certain delegates emphasised their desire to move beyond Catholic concerns, to unite with Irish Protestants, and to adopt the national reformist cause. Dr. Thomas Ryan was especially insistent that the Irish Catholics ought to 'lay aside your own question because you are not supported by your own people nor other parties' and that, instead, they should 'coalesce with Protestant brethren ... lay aside the little character of a sect and take up the character of a people'.⁸² He urged the Committee to direct its fire 'against the monopolists' and to seek a reform of parliament on the grounds that 'if reform is obtained, the penal code goes down at once'.⁸³

Like Doctor Ryan, Theobald McKenna also called for the Committee's dissolution. He recommended that they resign their 'charge' thereby 'leaving the people free to act or acquiesce'.⁸⁴ McKenna asserted that, although the Catholic convention had previously been a necessity, the need for maintaining a standing body of Catholic delegates no longer existed. Describing the Catholic Committee as a 'separate jurisdiction' which served to injure 'the service to your King and the credit of your country', McKenna insisted that the proper time had arrived for all Irishmen to

⁸⁰ *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 2.

⁸¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 263 [19 April 1793].

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 265-6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Theobald McKenna, *Substance of the Arguments Offered to the General Meeting of the Roman Catholics, 22 April 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 1.

unite and become 'heartily coalesced and blended'.⁸⁵ Finally, McKenna expressed his personal opinion that it would be pointless to continue to agitate for complete emancipation:

I do not think that the Representative Franchise was in any wise attainable; in the present state of things I do not think that it is very important ... we did not recollect or perceive, that of our numbers a considerable majority are in extreme indigence. That these persons think nothing about franchise, but everything about subsistence.⁸⁶

Partly as a result of these persuasive arguments expressed by members of the General Committee, the Catholic Committee voted to conclude its campaign and dissolve its assembly. A final publication was prepared to inform the Catholics of Ireland about this decision and also to state a series of final resolutions. These resolutions contained a list of the individuals to whom the Committee felt indebted, including the king, Irish officials, the Irish parliament and Protestant allies both in and out of parliament. The resolutions then specifically named the recipients of special awards, including the five members of the Westminster deputation, who each received a plate worth 100 guineas, and T. W. Tone and William Todd Jones, who were given cash rewards. The Committee also reiterated its attachment to the Constitution, which was described as 'the best medium between licentiousness and arbitrary power; possessing ... the means of counteracting the views of the incendiary and the unfounded speculatist', and it made a recommendation for 'the union of all classes and descriptions of his [Majesty's] subjects, in support of our excellent constitution'.⁸⁷ In the April 1793 publication the Committee emphasised the importance of this union, hoping that Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants could cooperate 'in all legal and

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸⁷ *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 4.

constitutional means, to carry into effect that great measure ... a reform in the representation of the people in the Commons House'.⁸⁸ Finally, after openly expressing this new Irish Catholic support for parliamentary reform, the publication concluded with the proud resolution:

That by the restoration of the Elective Franchise, the Catholics of Ireland are now enabled to speak, individually, the language of FREEMEN; and as we no longer wish to be considered as a distinct body of his Majesty's subjects, we render up our trust to the people, who sent us hither; and this Committee is hereby dissolved.⁸⁹

Despite this intentional display of unity and optimism, however, the Catholic Committee did not dissolve under entirely optimal conditions. The dissention, which was endemic within the sub-committee throughout 1793, strained relations between former colleagues. In particular, T. W. Tone felt marginalised and disappointed by the final outcome of the Irish Catholic campaign. Irish MP George Knox had reported a quarrel between Tone and Keogh in early February, 'Keogh says [Tone] thwarted him and wanted to push the Catholics into a union with Belfast. Tone says Keogh tyrannised over him and wanted to make him dependent'.⁹⁰ Ultimately, Tone was left to disagree with the other Committee members, who chose temporarily to abandon the cause of total emancipation and to dissolve peacefully, appearing grateful for the degree of relief contained in the act of 1793. Unlike these other activists, Tone publicly disparaged the Catholic relief legislation:

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Anthony Malcolmson, *Catholic Emancipation, 1793-1829* [insert, Knox to Abercorn, 6 February 1793].

By their exclusion from the two Houses of Parliament, the whole body of the Catholic gentry of Ireland ... are insulted and disgraced, thrown down from the level of their fortune and their talents and branded with a mark of subjugation, the last relic of interested bigotry. This is the radical defect of the bill, if the Catholics deserve what has been granted, they deserve what has been withheld; if they did not deserve what has been withheld, what has been granted should have been refused.⁹¹

Similarly, before the final meeting of the Catholic General Assembly on 25 April, an embittered Theobald McKenna took the opportunity to criticise the actions of the sub-committee. He claimed that 'the persons who undertook to superintend your affairs, or rather to supercede all others ... were eager to monopolize to themselves the honor of appearing in it'.⁹² Although he considered the Catholic Relief Act extremely substantial, McKenna also held the sub-committee responsible for the failure of total emancipation, 'the blame lights upon your negotiators', a group which he called 'the conceding party'.⁹³ McKenna expressed his disapproval over the strong words spoken at the convention, which had been 'mere vapour which we had neither the means nor inclination to enforce', as well as the Irish Catholic deputation to Westminster, which he had considered unnecessary: 'I opposed the embassy to England, and I still congratulate myself on having opposed it; I considered that mode of transmitting our petition, useless, inflammatory and indelicate'.⁹⁴ Finally, McKenna believed that reconvening an expanded General Committee in April 1793 had been 'needless' and that the overall legacy of chronic mismanagement was extremely detrimental to the entire future of the Catholic cause:

⁹¹ Frank MacDermott, *Theobald Wolfe Tone*, pp. 112-3.

⁹² Theobald McKenna, *Substance of the Arguments Offered to the General Meeting of the Roman Catholics, 22 April 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 22.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

... the hostility of our proceedings, have created great indisposition against us. The ferment excited has been so great, and its consequences so pernicious, that moderate men will be deterred from urging, or engaging in the question.⁹⁵

After their cooperation and camaraderie at the end of 1792, the Catholic Committee also found itself increasingly at odds with the Irish Catholic clergy in 1793. In February 1793, Archbishop Troy had decided that it was necessary to publish a pamphlet entitled *A Pastoral Instruction on the Duties of Christian Citizens, Addressed to the Roman Catholics of Dublin* in order to emphasise the relationship between rulers and subjects and also to clarify certain tenets of Catholic faith. Troy took this action largely in response to inaccurate statements and charges made publicly by certain Irish writers and politicians in early 1793, but he did so without any input by or agreement from the Irish Catholic Committee. As a result, although much of Troy's pamphlet was unobjectionable and merely reinforced the Committee's declarations of Catholic obedience and loyalty, certain passages succeeded in arousing Protestant doubts and suspicions.

Troy conservatively asserted that 'society implies different classes and orders of men, necessarily subordinate and dependant' and that 'true liberty holds a middle place between that independence which admits no restraint, and the condition of a slave who acknowledges the sole will of a despot as law and government'.⁹⁶ He then went on to attack the new democratic and levelling principles which were spreading throughout Western Europe: 'the peace of society is disturbed by the frantic zeal of innovators and reformers in religion to establish their peculiar tenets'.⁹⁷ Although these claims generally agreed with much of the Catholic Committee's own published statements and

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁹⁶ John Thomas Troy, *A Pastoral Instruction on the Duties of Christian Citizens, Addressed to the Roman Catholics of Dublin* (Dublin, 1793), p. 4.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

did not cause particular offence, the Archbishop went on to discuss matters of Catholic doctrine, which resulted in much greater controversy. The Catholic Archbishop of Dublin reopened debates over particular tenets of Catholicism, such as keeping faith with Protestants; Catholic loyalty to secular rulers; and the infallibility of the Pope, after Protestant concerns had seemingly been calmed by the Catholic Committee's publication of March 1792. He explained that his reasons for doing this were that 'the old calumnies against the Pope and authority of the church' had been revived 'at a time particularly critical'.⁹⁸ Although Archbishop Troy had intended to clarify the precise rules governing these doctrines and, thereby, to uphold the loyalty of Irish Catholics, ultimately he succeeded in reawakening suspicion. This may have resulted from his imprudent choice of words, which led Irish Protestants to question the ambiguity surrounding the doctrine of Papal infallibility:

Catholics, therefore, are obliged to adhere implicitly to such decrees and canons of the church assembled in general council and confirmed by the Pope ... but they are divided on the question of personal infallibility in the Pope ... the infallibility of the church is an article of Catholic faith: the infallibility of the Pope is not; and may be embraced or rejected as an opinion, according to the judgement formed of the arguments for and against it.⁹⁹

Anthony Thompson, the delegate to the Catholic convention from Thurles, wrote to Archbishop Bray expressing an opinion on Troy's pastoral that 'we wish its publication had not taken place'.¹⁰⁰ Also, Chief Secretary Hobart later admitted that 'a very recent publication by Dr. Troy ... had raised doubts in many minds upon some of the tenets of their church'.¹⁰¹ Largely as a result of Archbishop Troy's pastoral letter, therefore, an attachment was made to the government's Catholic Relief bill of 1793,

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁰⁰ P. O'Donoghue, 'The Catholic Church and Ireland in an Age of Revolution and Rebellion, 1782-1803' (unpublished PhD thesis, UCD, 1975), p. 208 [5 March 1793].

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210 [Hobart to Evan Nepean, 6 March 1793].

maintaining the traditional requirement that all Irish Catholics wishing to benefit from the relief legislation had to swear a newly updated oath of obedience.

Hobart described the Irish government's insistence 'that such tenets should be clearly disavowed and that the principles of their declaration should be converted into the form of an oath binding every man who was to receive franchise or preferment under the bill'.¹⁰² Henry Grattan also explained how Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon had spoken in the House of Lords in early March about using the Catholic Committee's own declaration as the basis for the new oath, '[he] introduced into the bill as a satisfactory oath their own declaration'.¹⁰³ Although both Rome and Archbishop Troy may have been initially displeased by this added requirement, which included the official rejection of papal infallibility, ultimately, the Irish Catholic clergy were forced to consent to the measure. Eventually, they succumbed to reassurances that the oath only related to the provisions of the new relief act and leading Catholic clerics subscribed to the oath by the end of May 1793. Thereafter, this action was followed by all Irish Catholics wishing to participate in the benefits granted by the relief act, an event frequently occurring provincially at specifically designated times and locations and demonstrated by a newspaper notice to Catholics in the town and borough of Cloughnikilty on 23 October 1793, 'an adjournment of the general sessions of peace will be held at the court house on Wednesday 6th November for the purpose of administering in this town and borough the oaths to Roman Catholics'.¹⁰⁴

In addition to the unexpected controversy which Archbishop Troy incited through the injudicious publication of his 1793 pastoral letter, the Catholic clergy and the Catholic Committee grew further apart over the issue of Irish Catholic education.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 364 [Henry Grattan to Edmund Burke, 25, 26 March 1793].

¹⁰⁴ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, pp. 290-1.

In early 1793, Troy met with other leading Catholic clerics to discuss the need for improvements to the educational system for Catholics in Ireland. Similarly, upon the dissolution of the General Committee of the Catholic Committee, a small number of individuals continued to conduct business in Dublin as a remnant sub-committee. One of the few tasks assigned to the care of this sub-committee involved a resolution contained in the Committee's pamphlet *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793*, '[to] consider improved system of education for Catholic youth'.¹⁰⁵ This issue, therefore, became an immediate concern for both clerical and lay Irish Catholic leaders.

In pursuit of this goal the Catholic sub-committee constructed an educational plan which would have accommodated both clerical and lay students and would have involved coordinated clerical and lay management. Unfortunately, however, despite early attempts at possible co-operation, Troy and other Catholic clerics objected to the sub-committee's proposal, decided to act independently, and formulated their own plan for Irish Catholic education without any consideration for the sub-committee's concerns. As a result of these efforts, the Irish Catholic clergy completely usurped the authority of the sub-committee, seized sole management over the measure, and, by the end of 1793, had prepared a memorandum in conjunction with the Irish administration which described only the need for an educated Catholic clergy to maintain obedience and order. Two years later, with the opening of the Catholic seminary of St. Patrick's at Maynooth, Archbishop Troy and the other Irish Catholic clerics saw the realisation of their plan, which fulfilled their expectations and satisfied their desire for an educated Irish Catholic clergy, but did little to aid in the education of the Catholic laity.

¹⁰⁵ *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 8.

Finally, in addition to disagreements with other Irish Catholic activists who felt disgruntled either by the actions of the sub-committee or by the insufficient provisions of the Relief Act, relations between Dublin Castle and the Catholic Committee were strained in the spring of 1793. After the Lord Chancellor had made public accusations in the Irish House of Lords and erroneous information had appeared in an official report prepared by a secret committee appointed to investigate Defender activity, the Catholic Committee felt compelled to publish pamphlets to clarify their stance on Defenderism and their relationship to the Defenders. Henry Grattan explained that in early 1793 Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon had 'conducted a committee to collect or suggest matter against [the Catholics'] allegiance'.¹⁰⁶ In the Catholic Committee's published account of their proceedings between 16 and 25 April, a clear resolution was included as a response stating that the Committee 'have so often ... endeavoured to impress on [the Defenders'] minds, our utmost detestation and abhorrence of such illegal and criminal proceedings'.¹⁰⁷ These sentiments were then reiterated, expanded and officially presented by the Committee in two separate pamphlets in the spring of 1793.

In *A Refutation of the Charges Attempted to be Made against the Secretary to the Subcommittee of the Catholics of Ireland, Particularly That of Abetting the Defenders*, the secretary of the Catholic Committee personally addressed the Irish public to vindicate the Committee. Additionally, in a second pamphlet entitled *Defence of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, from the Imputations Attempted to be Thrown on that Body, Particularly from the Charge of Supporting the Defenders*, the Catholic Committee made factual evidence available, including an address to the Defenders framed by the Committee on 25 July 1792. In his refutation

¹⁰⁶ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 366 [Henry Grattan to Edmund Burke, 25, 26 March 1793].

¹⁰⁷ *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 8.

John Sweetman, who served as secretary to the Committee in the spring of 1793, described the Defenders as 'infatuated wretches' and 'deluded people' whom the Committee had always urged to appear peaceful. He denied corresponding, communicating with, or encouraging any Defender activity and he insisted that he had 'never sent [them] any money nor ordered any money to be paid to the Defenders'.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in the second publication, the Catholic sub-committee provided details of the events of 1792 when three Committee members had travelled to Rathfriland to meet with Protestant gentlemen to learn about the disorders and then to contribute to the preparation of a public address to the Defenders urging peace. Like Sweetman, the sub-committee explained that their sizeable expenses were always defrayed through 'voluntary subscription' and that they had, therefore, never given the Defenders any money.¹⁰⁹ In his pamphlet, Sweetman bluntly claimed that Defenderism in Armagh and Louth in 1792 had actually been fuelled by the Protestant Peep O' Day Boys and that all attempts to connect the Catholic Committee to the rural disorders were merely attempts to slander and discredit the Catholic activists at the moment of their greatest achievement, the successful passage of relief legislation in 1793:

The whole of that mass of misrepresentation is nothing more than a chain of ingenious insinuations founded upon surmise and supposition, for the sole purpose of attempting to prove one proposition, namely, that certain Catholics in Dublin did take measures to disturb the peace and happiness of the country.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ John Sweetman, *A Refutation of the Charges Attempted to be Made against the Secretary to the Subcommittee of the Catholics of Ireland, Particularly That of Abetting the Defenders* (Dublin, 1793), pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁹ *Defence of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, from the Imputations Attempted to be Thrown on that Body, Particularly from the Charge of Supporting the Defenders* (Dublin, 1793), p. 10.

¹¹⁰ John Sweetman, *A Refutation of the Charges Attempted to be Made against the Secretary to the Subcommittee of the Catholics of Ireland, Particularly That of Abetting the Defenders* (Dublin, 1793), p. 8.

While the Catholics of Ireland received what McKenna hailed as 'the most substantial advantage acquired by this nation since the first British invasion', ¹¹¹ the sub-committee of the Catholic Committee were, therefore, left divided, disregarded by the Irish Catholic clergy, and disrespected by the Irish administration. Furthermore, despite the efforts of the sub-committee, Catholic activism continued to be linked to escalating Defender activity throughout 1793. Thomas Bartlett has explained that many Protestants drew the conclusion that the activities of the Catholic Committee and those of the Defenders were integral parts of the same 'intimidating system' and, also, that certain Irish Protestants were becoming convinced 'that the Defenders were the military wing of the Catholic Committee'. ¹¹²

The provisions of the Relief Act did not result in immediate changes to many established practices of Irish society and, generally, persecution grew worse after the passage of the legislation. Due in part to the findings contained in Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon's Secret Committee Report of 1793, the Irish administration began to take strong action to contain rural violence and Defenderism. Catholic Committee members were targeted, arrested and imprisoned in the affected parts of Ireland on charges of assisting the Defenders. Writing to Evan Nepean one year later, on 15 April 1794, John Keogh captured this mood of disappointment and frustration, 'the attempts to destroy our character have been followed by the present conspiracy against the lives and liberties of respectable Catholics'. ¹¹³ Keogh then explained to Nepean:

¹¹¹ Theobald McKenna, *Substance of the Arguments Offered ... 22 April 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 19.

¹¹² Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830*, pp. 173-180.

¹¹³ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/46/154-157 [Keogh to Evan Nepean, 15 April 1794].

At the moment that the Catholics expected to be received as the friends of government – at the moment of the recommendation in their favour, that men in high authority commenced an unfounded and violent attack upon them, their cause and their character, their disappointment was truly great.¹¹⁴

He was careful to emphasise in this letter that he did not hold British ministers personally responsible for these outrages, since ‘to grant a law and to prevent its benefits is a duplicity beneath their characters’.¹¹⁵ Instead, he blamed ‘the malice or the monopoly of three or four men’, all of them officials in the Irish administration.¹¹⁶ Speaking at a public meeting of the Roman Catholics of Dublin in April 1795, Keogh reiterated these opinions, adding even greater detail to his descriptions of the outrages committed in the months following the passage of the 1793 Relief Act:

Parties were encouraged against us; we were shut out from the city and many other grand juries: The Corporation of Dublin was permitted to go on in their bigotry and exclusion: the government prints let loose against us; and some of our brethren, men of property and character in the midst of their trade, dragged from the counting houses, thrown into prison ... escaping punishment, nay death, but by a miracle ...¹¹⁷

Overall, therefore, Keogh was forced to admit in 1794 that conditions for Catholics in Ireland were ‘very different, indeed, from what was hoped by the Catholic delegates’.¹¹⁸

Within several months, however, hope re-emerged for the Irish Catholic leaders because of the appointment of a new Lord Lieutenant, the liberal-minded Earl Fitzwilliam, who R. B. McDowell has described as ‘an intelligent, generous, high-

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *Authentic Statement of the Proceedings of the Roman Catholics of Dublin, April 9, 1795* (London, 1795), pp. 7-8.

¹¹⁸ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/46/154-157 [Keogh to Evan Nepean, 15 April 1794].

handed man'.¹¹⁹ While the present administration at Dublin Castle had been blamed for raising opposition to the Committee and to the Catholic cause, the announcement, in November 1794, of the appointment of a new, pro-Catholic Lord Lieutenant filled Irish Catholic activists with optimism. J. E. Devereux later described this euphoria, 'there was but one common feeling of mutual congratulation all over the island on this joyous event'.¹²⁰

In preparation for the start of Lord Fitzwilliam's administration, former sub-committee members met with certain Irish MPs, including Henry Grattan, who helped to advise the Catholics and assured them of Fitzwilliam's intended support. Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon later wrote that, in December 1794, Grattan had 'sent for Mr. Edward Byrne and Mr. Keogh, he pledged Lord Fitzwilliam to them for the unqualified repeal of all the laws which affected them ... [and] directed them to pour in petitions to parliament'.¹²¹ In accord with this advice, therefore, Irish Catholic activists drew up a new petition to submit to the Irish parliament requesting the completion of Catholic relief through total emancipation.

Within weeks of the new Lord Lieutenant's arrival, the Catholic activists felt justified in their optimism as Fitzwilliam was prompt to remove objectionable officials at the Castle and was eager to recognise Irish Catholic concerns through the introduction of a further relief bill. Writing on 15 January 1795 to the Duke of Portland, the new Home Secretary at Westminster, Fitzwilliam urged 'no time is to be lost ... not to grant on the part of the government all the Catholics wish will not only be

¹¹⁹ R. B. McDowell, 'The Fitzwilliam Episode' *Irish Historical Studies*, 15 (1966), p. 117.

¹²⁰ James Edward Devereux, *Observations on the Factions Which Have Ruled Ireland; on the Calumnies Thrown upon the People of the Country, and the Necessity of Restoring to the Catholics Their Political Rights* (London, 1801), pp. 102-3.

¹²¹ R. B. McDowell, 'The Fitzwilliam Episode' *Irish Historical Studies*, 15 (1966), p. 122 [FitzGibbon to Westmorland, 25 March 1795].

exceedingly impolitic, but perhaps dangerous'.¹²² The new Irish Lord Lieutenant then further asserted his intention to concede Irish Catholic relief, 'If I receive no very peremptory directions to the contrary, I shall acquiesce with a good grace in order to avoid the manifest ill effect of a doubt or the appearance of a hesitation'.¹²³

It was a crushing blow, therefore, when Earl Fitzwilliam was suddenly and abruptly recalled from his position as Lord Lieutenant by 25 February 1795, mere days after his relief bill had been introduced into the Irish parliament. In desperation Keogh, Byrne and Baron Hussey were immediately despatched to present their new petition to the king at Westminster and, also, to confer with British officials about completing Catholic emancipation with the final grant of the relief measures that had been withheld in 1793. Unfortunately, although the Irish Catholic delegates succeeded in attending a royal leveé on 13 March 1795 to present their petition, they had little success with the new Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland. Unlike his predecessor, Henry Dundas, Portland 'declined giving any information whatsoever, save that his Majesty had imparted his pleasure thereon to the Lord Lieutenant and that he was the proper channel through which that information should pass'.¹²⁴ Thoroughly deflated by the unhelpful attitudes of British ministers at Westminster, the Irish Catholic activists returned to Dublin to see the anticipated Catholic relief bill fade into oblivion, defeated in the Irish parliament and abandoned by the administration.

The Catholics were both outraged and aggravated by the failure of Catholic relief and the total disregard for the Catholic cause as demonstrated by Earl Fitzwilliam's recall. In strong contrast to all preceding crises, however, the Catholic activists of Ireland adopted a new belief system and began to hold the British

¹²² Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830*, p. 196.

¹²³ R. B. McDowell, 'The Fitzwilliam Episode' *Irish Historical Studies*, 15 (1966), 126 [Fitzwilliam to Portland, 15 January 1795].

¹²⁴ *Authentic Statement of the Proceedings of the Roman Catholics of Dublin, April 9, 1795* (London, 1795), p. 1.

administration in England responsible for obstructing Catholic emancipation, a view which was made public and voiced at an important gathering held in Dublin on 9 April 1795 at the Saint Francis Street chapel. Both John Keogh and Edward Byrne were present at this meeting of the Catholics of Dublin and were able to report on their recent experiences at Westminster. Additionally, Catholic activists W. J. MacNeven and Doctor Ryan attended and delivered powerful speeches, which gave strong indications that, in addition to Irish officials, British ministers were believed to share the blame for the continued subordination of the Irish Catholics.

After informing the assembled crowd that his 'application to the [Home] Secretary, and a letter to another of his Majesty's ministers to solicit and interview, both failed of success', ¹²⁵ Keogh went on to describe the anti-Catholic violence over the preceding months and to express his shock at the discovery of disturbing information relating to Earl Fitzwilliam's dismissal:

A late publication ... of part of the correspondence supposed to be between Earl Fitzwilliam and one of his Majesty's ministers has torn away that veil that was before thrown over the influence of British ministers in the affairs of Ireland ... an interference so barefaced and avowed in the affairs of a country, said to be independent, ¹²⁶

MacNeven also voiced strong anti-British sentiments by referring to 'an external barrier' and by stating that 'a power that is foreign and hostile to both [Catholics and Protestants] would, for its own purposes, retain us in different conditions'. ¹²⁷ He bluntly proclaimed his belief that 'the policy of England appears to be this: to maintain a Protestant Ascendancy ... party, which shall be solely employed in preserving its own little superiority'. ¹²⁸ Finally, vindicating the majority of the Protestants of

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

Ireland, MacNeven expressed his outrage 'that what the patriotism of our Protestant countrymen would willingly confer, an English cabinet should dare to frustrate'.¹²⁹

Similarly, Dr. Ryan shared his fears with the assembled crowd, 'I confess I cannot think of the present period without alarm'.¹³⁰ He then went on to voice his disgust at the actions of the British administration, 'I cannot conceive how the British minister can take upon himself the responsibility of the measures which are now pursuing in Ireland'.¹³¹ The Catholic activist expressed the opinions that as an outcome of Earl Fitzwilliam's sudden departure, the people of Ireland had gained a renewed sense of purpose and that they now needed to unite to resist British control: 'It is only the other day that you ceased to be a multitude thrown together without any sense of a common interest ... but the conduct of the British cabinet has hastened an event of which it was not aware'.¹³² Echoing the sentiments he had expressed two years earlier in April 1793 when the General Committee had decided to dissolve, Dr. Ryan urged the Catholics of Dublin 'to abandon the pursuit of your own particular question if the security of Protestants and the existence of your country should require it'.¹³³

In stark opposition to Keogh's statements one year earlier in 1794 when he had written that 'the Catholics are far from believing that these measures [in Ireland] are directed by the ministers in England',¹³⁴ all of the Irish Catholic speakers at the 1795 public meeting shared an emerging belief in the detrimental influence of Westminster in Irish affairs. Between 1791 and 1793, the Catholic Committee had turned to British ministers with the optimistic expectation of support and, after 1792, with the desperate

¹²⁹ *Orations Delivered at a Numerous and Respectable Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at St Francis St. Chapel on Thursday the 9 of April, 1795* (Cork, 1795), p. 10.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹³² *Authentic Statement of the Proceedings of the Roman Catholics of Dublin, April 9, 1795* (London, 1795), p. 19.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹³⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/46/154-157 [Keogh to Evan Nepean, 15 April 1794].

desire for assistance at counteracting the obstructionist policies of the Irish cabinet. The dramatic shift in Irish politics which occurred after Earl Fitzwilliam's dismissal in 1795, however, thoroughly altered the relationship between the Catholic activists and the British government and anticipated a new, far more radical, direction for Irish Catholics. Following the advice of particular Catholic leaders, such as Doctor Ryan and W. J. MacNeven, many of the Irish Catholics who continued to participate in national politics adopted an unprecedented interest in Irish self-determination and national identity. These new concerns were demonstrated through the closing resolution of the meeting in which the speakers 'earnestly recommend to the Catholics of Ireland to cultivate by all possible means the friendship and affection of their Protestant brethren, ... national union is national strength, happiness and prosperity'.¹³⁵ They were also evident in the statement of a final Catholic speaker, Mr. Lewins, who proclaimed that:

Today we are undeceived, today we perceive what weight the prayers of the Irish people have in the decisions of the English cabinet; today we see that English cabinet in its true point of view ... The people of Ireland are never more to look up to the cabinet of England for protection and relief.¹³⁶

In the final half of the 1790s, the Irish Catholic cause made no significant advances. Instead, with the arrival of Lord Lieutenant Camden in early 1795, the persecution described by Keogh in 1794 continued and was gradually heightened with the introduction of government authorised military forces, which were employed to contain the threat of radicalism. This in turn drove increasing numbers of disaffected subjects to ally with the popular, anti-establishment, secret Society of United Irishmen

¹³⁵ *Orations Delivered at a Numerous and Respectable Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at St Francis St. Chapel on Thursday the 9 of April, 1795* (Cork, 1795), p. 30

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

and, ultimately, contributed to the Irish uprising of 1798 and to the Irish Act of Union of 1800.

Despite their dissolution and political inactivity after 1795, many former members of the Catholic Committee were caught up in this turmoil and dissent. Some Catholic activists, such as W. J. MacNeven and Richard McCormick, became deeply involved with the Society of United Irishmen, while others, including Edward Byrne, Thomas Braughall, and J. E. Devereux, maintained a more cautious relationship with the radical organisation and never became fully-fledged participants. This aversion to radicalism and outright rebellion was demonstrated in several circumstances. For example, J. W. Hammond has stated that Thomas Braughall:

was conscientiously opposed to the attainment of sectarian equality by either civil war or revolutionary methods. Therefore, he took no part in the political movement organised by the new secret Society of United Irishmen from 1795 onwards.¹³⁷

Writing in 1801, J. E. Devereux also displayed this aversion to contemporary radicalism by describing 'the detestable revolutionary faction of France' and 'the vile tools of the Jacobin government of Paris'.¹³⁸ Although many former members of the Catholic Committee sought to avoid involvement in the radical tactics of the United Irishmen, they were, nevertheless, drawn into conflict with the Irish government. Both Keogh and Braughall were arrested on suspicion of participation and, as Gywnn has claimed, Keogh was driven to burn potentially incriminating papers after receiving

¹³⁷ J. W. Hammond, 'Thomas Braughall, 1729-1803 Catholic Emancipationist', *Dublin Historical Record*, 14 (1956), 41-49.

¹³⁸ James Edward Devereux, *Observations on the Factions Which Have Ruled Ireland; on the Calumnies Thrown upon the People of the Country, and the Necessity of Restoring to the Catholics Their Political Rights* (London, 1801), p. 95.

warnings of a raid.¹³⁹ In this hostile environment, therefore, legitimate government opposition and peaceful out-of-doors politics became virtually impossible as former Catholic activists were forced to act to protect their property and their lives.

Although the cause of Irish patriotism suffered following the closure of the Irish parliament and the loss of Irish legislative independence in 1800, the Catholic cause was eventually reawakened. In 1804 and 1805, surviving members of the Catholic Committee again attempted the completion of Catholic emancipation with requests for the rights to sit in parliament; to hold high legal and military offices; and, also, to be appointed as sheriffs. Although Catholic activists specified these measures, they primarily sought the social equality that had eluded them since 1793. One contemporary Irish Catholic remarked that 'everything that regarded the execution of the laws was highly partial and abused'.¹⁴⁰ He went on to elaborate on these conditions in Ireland in a conversation with Prime Minister Pitt:

It was notorious, and the [Catholic] deputies would aver, that the Act of 1793 has remained a dead letter and never been acted upon. Lord Fingall mentioned that at the most perhaps three or four situations have, since that time, been given to Catholics.¹⁴¹

Similar to the Irish Catholic campaign of 1790 – 1793, the reinvented Catholic Committee included both John Keogh, before his death in 1817, and Irish Catholic aristocrats, such as Lord Fingall. They prepared a petition to be presented to parliament and met with British ministers in early 1805. In contrast to the events of the 1790s, however, a national Catholic convention had been made impossible due to restrictive legislation and few attempts were made by the Irish Catholic leaders to

¹³⁹ Denis Gwynn, *John Keogh*, p. 1 and J. W. Hammond, 'Thomas Braughall, 1729-1803 Catholic Emancipationist', *Dublin Historical Record*, 14 (1956), 42. See also, Frank MacDermott, *Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. 154.

¹⁴⁰ Frank MacDermott, *Theobald Wolfe Tone*, p. 82 [*Denys Scully's Diary*, 12 March 1805].

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

confer with the county Catholic organisations. John Keogh deplored this failure and openly objected to the tactics preferred by this smaller, more conservative and exclusive Catholic Committee:

When the late revived Committee conducted the claims of the Catholics, the least part of their labours was that of preparing a petition. A vast number of previous measures were adopted to pave the way for the success of their petition. They consulted with their brethren, not only in Dublin, but in all the distant counties. They conciliated the liberal Protestants in and out of Parliament. They applied to and convinced his Majesty's ministers ... and by such conduct they triumphed over a violent and formidable opposition and finally obtained the privileges which are now enjoyed.¹⁴²

Unfortunately, also in contrast to the 1790s, Prime Minister Pitt declined to support the reinvented Catholic Committee in the early 1800s and total Irish Catholic emancipation was again prevented.

This situation was not finally rectified until the famous campaign led by respected Irish Catholic activist and County Kerry lawyer Daniel O'Connell in the 1820s. O'Connell's political tactics, which employed the voting power of the Irish Catholic masses, were drastically different from anything previously attempted by either the Catholic Committee of the 1790s or the 1800s. Fergus O'Ferrall has described the ultimate reward of Catholic emancipation as 'a symbolic victory for the Catholic people of Ireland: the first token of national rehabilitation and self-respect obtained by the efforts of the people themselves'.¹⁴³ Although the author may have been referring specifically to the efforts of the Irish Catholics of the 1820s, the important contributions of the Irish Catholic people in the 1790s should not be overlooked as it was only through their efforts and their success at receiving the

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 42 [John Keogh to Owen O'Connor, January 1805].

¹⁴³ Fergus O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy, 1820-30* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985), p. 287.

parliamentary franchise that Daniel O'Connell was able to use the strength of the Irish Catholic voting public to secure total emancipation in 1829.

Moreover, despite the pessimistic views of many Irish Catholic leaders after 1793, the Catholic relief acts of 1792 and 1793 extended several long-term benefits. They encouraged aspiring Irish Catholics, such as O'Connell, to pursue careers in the legal field, which resulted in the development of later generations of trained Irish Catholic barristers and politicians. As T. P. Power has observed, the relief legislation created 'an impressive number' of forty shilling freeholders 'through the granting of life tenancies across the country and those [freeholders] who were politically active in the 1790s and 1800s gave leases to small holders to enhance their political prospects'.¹⁴⁴ Finally, Anthony Malcolmson has noted that these freeholders were then able to use their restored rights to place 'unobtrusive, but still effective, pressure ... on Protestant candidates and members of parliaments from at least 1807 onwards'.¹⁴⁵

Kevin Whelan has argued that the right to bear arms, which was granted to propertied Catholics in 1793, 'constituted a fundamental badge of citizenship in a pre-democratic state' and was, therefore, an immediate benefit for, 'if Catholics asserted their right to bear arms publicly, they asserted their right to full participation in the political nation'.¹⁴⁶ Power has also commented on more immediate examples of Catholic relief in County Tipperary in 1793, including the selection of a Catholic justice-of-the-peace and the inclusion of four Catholics on the county Grand Jury,¹⁴⁷ an event which was reported by contemporary newspapers:

¹⁴⁴ T. P. Power, *Land Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary*, p. 158.

¹⁴⁵ Anthony Malcolmson, *Catholic Emancipation, 1793-1829*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁶ Kevin Whelan, 'An Underground Gentry? Catholic Middlemen in Eighteenth-Century Ireland' *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: iris an da chultúr*, x (1995), 51.

¹⁴⁷ T. P. Power, *Land Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary*, p. 296.

Co. Tipperary Grand Jury. Summer Assizes 1793. The names of four Catholics appear, for the first time, on the grand jury panel of twenty-three members, viz. Ulick Alleyn; James Scully; Laurence Smith and Denis Meagher.¹⁴⁸

Several months later these newspapers also contained the result of a decision made at a Common Council Meeting in Limerick, awarding 'the freedom of that city' to five Roman Catholics, including the Bishops of Limerick and Killaloe.¹⁴⁹

Finally, the political campaigns surrounding the Catholic relief acts of 1792 and 1793 should be appreciated for their symbolic significance. Anthony Malcolmson has recognised 1793 as an important turning point 'marking the close of the penal and the start of the emancipation era'.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Thomas Bartlett has stated that 'the public signing of petitions, the calling of a convention, the sending of delegates to London – all had their impact on Catholic consciousness ... and heralded a new struggle for power in Ireland'.¹⁵¹ While Louis Cullen has simply remarked that 'the Catholic convention in 1792 represented the first occasion in a century when the lay Catholics of Ireland had gathered together for a common purpose. That in itself was revolutionary'.¹⁵² The Catholic Committee's actions between 1790 and 1793, therefore, helped to awaken a hitherto unseen national political consciousness among the Catholics of Ireland and paved the way for Catholic participation in the popular movements of the nineteenth-century. The Catholics of Ireland began to recognise their own political strength and, from the 1790s onward, the concept of social and political equality became a plausible objective to be pursued. As evidence of this symbolic rise in social status, Malcolmson has observed that, 'the act of 1793 gave the

¹⁴⁸ J. Brady (ed.), *Catholics and Catholicism in the Eighteenth-Century Press*, p. 290 [23 July 1793].

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 291 [17 February 1794].

¹⁵⁰ Anthony Malcolmson, *Catholic Emancipation, 1793-1829*, p. 27.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830*, p. 172.

¹⁵² Louis Cullen, 'Catholics under the Penal Laws' *Eighteenth-Century Ireland: iris an da chultúr*, i (1986), p. 35.

first statutory recognition to the term *Roman Catholic* as an alternative to *popish*'.¹⁵³ Within the space of a mere five years, the Catholics of Ireland had evolved from humbly requesting any relief that the Irish parliament conceded to grant to demanding equal inclusion into the political culture of Ireland and total *emancipation*, a term never before in regular use among Irish Catholic organisations before the 1790s.

Speaking in the Irish House of Lords on 13 March 1793, Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon accurately stated that 'the papists of Ireland now hold the balance of power in the state, that whatever party they may chose to join must prevail'.¹⁵⁴ Although this short-lived political reality was temporarily crushed by the passage of the Irish Act of Union in 1800, the newly enfranchised Irish Catholic electorate did wield the political power to support the campaign of Daniel O'Connell and to secure their complete emancipation in 1829. More crucially, however, the newly politicised Irish Catholics were able to apply their reclaimed strength to the future struggles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, ultimately, to assist in the eventual completion of Irish nationalism and Irish independence.

¹⁵³ Anthony Malcolmson, *Catholic Emancipation, 1793-1829*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ *The Speech of the Right Honorable John Lord Baron, Lord High Chancellor of Ireland, Delivered in the House of Peers on the Second Reading of the Bill for the Relief of His Majesty's Roman Catholic Subjects, 13 March 1793* (Dublin, [1793]), p. 27.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Character of the Catholic Committee: Sectarian, Radical or Patriotic ?

Many modern historians have overlooked the Catholic Committee's political campaign in the 1790s, avoiding a detailed and comprehensive investigation of the Committee's membership, activities, and motivation; while other researchers have drawn the movement into broader, more general studies of eighteenth-century Ireland. These studies have offered differing and potentially contradictory characterisations of the nature of the Catholic Committee, describing the movement as either sectarian or radical, but frequently failing to appreciate the presence of Irish Catholic patriotism. This chapter, therefore, will consider the evidence for or against these varied interpretations and will determine their accuracy and suitability as applied to the Irish Catholic Committee.

Although the term 'sectarian' is frequently used in a contemporary, twentieth-century context, in this chapter it will be applied to the internal tensions of eighteenth-century Ireland, which can be described as conflicts arising specifically from religious differences between Catholics and Protestants. Rather than economic, social, or political considerations, which may play secondary roles, therefore, sectarian conflicts are primarily motivated by religious intolerance, hatred, or bigotry. It is essential to determine whether this term is applicable to the Catholic movement of the 1790s and if the Catholic Committee itself considered the Protestant body of Ireland to be a hostile enemy.

Similarly, the term 'radical' can be vague and difficult to pin down. Although many eighteenth-century Irish reformers and organisations have been described as

radical, in practice this title encompasses a wide range of opinion and activity. Some activists have been termed radical simply because they supported out-of-doors political activity to help bring about a reform of the Irish Parliament. On the far end of this scale, however, were those radicals and reformers who ultimately took up arms, inviting outright revolutionary insurrection in pursuit of their aims, which may have involved the creation of a completely independent and republican state on the French model. Moreover, despite the extreme delicacy with which this term ought to be utilised, many modern historians apply it to a range of Irish activists, often using it rather loosely and haphazardly. The primary purpose of the term 'radical' in this chapter is to counterbalance the term 'moderate' and thereby to act as a point of comparison. While radicals were universal in pursuing and emphasising popular, out-of-doors political practices to achieve their aim of reform, moderates continued to maintain an overriding faith in more traditional, parliamentary approaches in order to address their grievances in a constitutional manner. This chapter will, therefore, explore whether radicalism was evident in Catholic tactics and whether the Catholic Committee can more accurately be described as 'radical' or 'moderate'.

Finally, 'patriot' is a term which has historically been given a very specific connotation, primarily referring to a political movement within the Irish Parliament and the Irish Protestant political nation. As early as the late seventeenth century, as can be seen in William Molyneux's famous tract, *The Case of Ireland's being Bound by the Acts of Parliament in England Stated*, (1698), Irish patriots had sought legislative independence from Westminster along with the recognition that, though sharing the same monarch, Ireland was a distinct kingdom, separate from England. An important triumph occurred in the early 1780s when Irish parliamentary patriots, such as Henry Grattan and Henry Flood, finally realised this ambition with the repeal of Poyning's

Law and the securing of what they believed to be full independence for the Irish Parliament. Moreover, this eighteenth-century parliamentary activity was supported out-of-doors by the popular Volunteer Societies, which agitated in support of patriotic aims. After the achievement of legislative independence, the term 'patriot' continued to be applied to those Irish MPs seeking to strengthen and further reform the parliament in order to make the Irish legislature free of the control of the Westminster-led Irish executive in Dublin, which exercised considerable influence over the Irish Parliament. As in the 1780s, popular support continued to exist in the 1790s for the cause of patriotism and the right of Ireland to be entirely self-governing, ruled by Irish representatives in its own parliament rather than by executive officials installed by and answerable to the Westminster cabinet. This out-of-doors, popular support for the cause of patriotic parliamentary reform will be considered in this chapter, particularly the two linked questions of whether the Catholic Committee adopted this patriot cause, in addition to its own purely Catholic objectives, and whether an alliance developed between the moderate patriots in parliament and the Irish Catholic leaders of the 1790s.

I

Sectarian ?

It would seem logical to presume that the Irish Catholic Committee's struggle for political rights in the 1790s was associated with a level of sectarian tension. The concurrent Defender movement was undeniably sectarian and certain modern historians have also depicted the campaign of the Catholic Committee as a sectarian contest. One example of this approach can be found in Thomas Bartlett's, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question 1690 – 1830*. Bartlett has used strong descriptive language to taint the movement with a sectarian bias, claiming that, 'if Catholic Ireland

was preparing to mobilise in pursuit of the franchise and other claims, Protestant Ireland too seemed determined to make its protest against any concessions'.¹ Bartlett has also assigned sectarian motives to the militia riots of 1793 and to the passage of varied pieces of parliamentary legislation in that year, 'the intention of this plethora of bills was unmistakeable; sectarian concessions to Catholics would be balanced both by national and defensive concessions to Protestants'.² A second example of implied sectarianism can be found in Marianne Elliott's *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*, where she incidentally observes that 'there was another reason for growing Catholic assertiveness and Protestant entrenchment'.³

Unfortunately, however, although this approach may provide a clear connection to the sectarian hostilities of the twentieth century, it may not be entirely appropriate to characterise the Irish Catholic relief campaign of the eighteenth century in these terms. For example, in opposition to Bartlett's and Elliott's general claims, Protestant Ireland was in no way a united, homogenous body in the 1790s. A range and diversity of opinion existed within the Protestant communities as demonstrated by the pro-Catholic, liberal attitudes of the Irish Whig Party in parliament, those Protestant citizens of Belfast, who presented outspoken petitions in support of Catholic relief, and the Volunteers at the Dungannon Convention of 1793 who resolved, 'we consider the immediate and entire emancipation of the Roman Catholics as a measure indispensably necessary to the safety and happiness of this country'.⁴ Patrick Rogers has portrayed this liberal tradition in Ulster by explaining:

¹ Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830*, p. 150.

² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

³ Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 154.

⁴ Patrick Rogers, *The Irish Volunteers and Catholic Emancipation, 1778-1793*, p. 298 [10th Resolution, 15 February 1793].

The unequivocal demand for Catholic emancipation crowned the work set on foot in North East Ulster over ten years before by Lord Bristol and William Todd Jones and carried on through the agency of Volunteers and United Irishmen until it attained its consummation in the official pronouncement of the Dungannon Convention.⁵

Moreover, examples of liberal tolerance were apparent in the southern counties in the pro-Catholic resolutions of the Protestant freeholders of County Wexford and County Cork, which sympathetically stated, 'Nor can we bring ourselves to imagine that the deprivation of the Elective Franchise is not a grievance, for we feel this right to be an inestimable privilege in ourselves'.⁶ These Protestant freeholders later officially declared 'their wish to grant the body of Catholics the same privileges as those enjoyed by Protestants'.⁷

In addition to highlighting these significant examples of pro-Catholic sympathy within the Protestant communities of Ireland, it is crucial to investigate Irish Catholic attitudes and to ask the question of whether the Catholic Committee itself exhibited sectarian, anti-Protestant prejudices. Thomas Bartlett has envisaged some degree of anti-Protestantism within the Catholic Committee by describing certain Committee expressions of appreciation towards the end of 1792 as 'conciliatory'.⁸ This interpretation might suggest that any public or official pro-Protestant statement made by the Catholic Committee during its campaign was an insincere political manoeuvre to sway Protestant opinion and did not represent genuine sentiments of unity or gratitude. By assigning to the Catholic Committee a latent bias, however, Bartlett has misinterpreted its motives, unwittingly discrediting the Irish Catholic struggle for political rights.

⁵ Ibid., p. 297.

⁶ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/281 ['Protestant Freeholders of County Cork', 8 October 1792].

⁷ National Archives of Ireland, Rebellion Papers, 620/19/101 [13 October 1792].

⁸ Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830*, p. 151.

Between 1790 and 1795, and throughout all of their public proclamations and personal correspondence, the members of the Irish Catholic Committee never once expressed any clear anti-Protestant or sectarian biases whatsoever. Neither did most members of the Committee display signs of intimidation or fear of political opponents in the latter half of 1792, after the withdrawal of the influence of the Kenmarite Party. Servile conciliation, therefore, was rarely practised by the Catholic Committee during the closing months of 1792. Instead, the Committee was resolutely outspoken in praise of its Protestant allies and in condemnation of its opponents.

As early as April 1791, a report contained in the Catholic Committee Minute Book reassured Catholic Ireland by claiming that 'the liberality of the times is favourable to your efforts, the prejudices entertained against you will subside in proportion as your principles and sentiments are made known and discussed'.⁹ This naïve optimism and blind faith in the liberal good will of the Irish public continued to be expressed by the Committee throughout the year and, ultimately, was disturbed only by the backlash resulting from the controversial publication of the *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin* in November 1791. Even after being confronted with this obstacle, however, the Catholic Committee continued to proclaim its unofficial policy of optimism:

in the present enlightened period of society we have reason to expect the assistance of all who wish well to their country and it does not become us to decide that government is unpropitious to our wishes before it has declared against us.¹⁰

Similarly, in the private interview that Hobart held with certain Committee members on 26 November 1791, Edward Byrne was recorded as displaying trust in liberal Irish

⁹ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 129 [18 April 1791].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 139 [3 December 1791].

Protestants by offering ‘to go round to all the Protestant gentlemen we know to assure them of our disapprobation of [*The Declaration of the Catholic Society*]’.¹¹ While in January 1792, a circular letter addressed to the principal Catholics of Ireland advised them to begin an immediate local canvass, and ‘if you can, to associate with yourselves Protestant gentlemen, with whose Liberality you are acquainted, to go round with you in the formal Part of your Canvass’.¹² This Catholic Committee circular then boldly stated, ‘we have a full and assured Confidence, that Liberality and a Sense of Justice pervade the Protestants in general; but bigoted Individuals still remain, and the best of Causes may have Enemies’.¹³

If the Catholic Committee had shown trust and general amity towards much of Protestant Ireland in the months prior to the Irish parliamentary session of 1792, their faith may have been shaken by the debates in the Irish Commons. On 4 February 1792, the Committee published *An Address from the General Committee of Roman Catholics, to Their Protestant Fellow Subjects, and to the Public in General, Respecting the Calumnies and Misrepresentations Now So Industiously Circulated* to respond to the vocal denunciation and slander that it had received from certain Irish MPs in parliament. In this pamphlet, however, the Committee merely defended the legality of its actions and clarified its political position. Although it stated that ‘the most powerful exertions [have] been employed to poison and alarm the public mind’ and ‘Sophistic arguments ... have been fabricated, to traduce our motives’, the publication neither

¹¹ National Archives of Ireland - Chief Secretary’s Office - Letterbook 417 [*Private Official Correspondence 1789 – 93*, VIII A/1/3], [Hobart to Evan Nepean, 8 October 1792].

¹² *At a Meeting of the General Committee of Roman Catholics, it was Resolved, that the Following Letter Should Be Addressed to the Different Committees, and to the Principal Persons of our Persuasion Throughout the Kingdom on January 14, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

named the parties responsible for this opposition nor expressed any opinions remotely hostile towards the Protestant communities of Ireland.¹⁴

Similarly, one month later, in March 1792, the Committee prepared the informative pamphlet, *The Declaration Adopted by the General Committee, March 17, 1792 and Subscribed by the Catholics of Ireland* in order to educate the Irish public and dispel any misunderstandings about particular Catholic tenets. It also held a public meeting of the Catholics of Dublin on 23 March to promote this pamphlet and to maintain local Irish Catholic support for its ongoing political campaign. All of the speakers at this public gathering spoke in defence of the Catholic cause, but none of them displayed anti-Protestant biases. John Keogh reiterated the Committee's earlier expressions of optimism by stating that 'he professed himself certain that in the present progressive state of reason and philosophy the mist of religious prejudice would be quickly dissolved'.¹⁵ These views were echoed by Committee member Hugh Hamill, who also referred to 'antiquated prejudices', which were 'daily mouldering away before the strong and collected force of reason'.¹⁶ Hamill recognised the assistance of those Protestant Irish MPs who had supported the Committee in parliament, while Keogh expressed his thanks to the mainly Protestant Society of United Irishmen for preparing the pamphlet, *The Digest of the Popery Laws*. Finally, even stronger statements of amity and camaraderie were displayed by Randall MacDonnell, who said, 'I am persuaded that the gratitude of the Catholics is accompanied by the approbation of

¹⁴ *An Address from the General Committee of Roman Catholics, to Their Protestant Fellow Subjects, and to the Public in General, Respecting the Calumnies and Misrepresentations Now so Industiously Circulated - February 4, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 4.

¹⁵ *A Report of the Debate which Took Place at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at the Music-Hall, Fishamble Street, Friday, March 23, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

every disinterested, unprejudiced and informed Protestant of this kingdom', ¹⁷ and also by an unnamed Catholic observer who enthusiastically exclaimed:

Our Protestant brethren [will] be rescued from fears and superstitious prejudices ... I am convinced that our Protestant fellow subjects will be proud, will feel a secret pleasure in anticipating our wishes and restoring to us a participation of that glorious Constitution. ¹⁸

While 1791 was primarily characterised by divisions within the Catholic Committee and with attempts to resolve differences between rival Irish Catholic factions, in the first half of 1792 the Committee was preoccupied with responding to the parliamentary claims of being unrepresentative and with working to forge political links with supporters nationwide. The spring and summer of 1792, therefore, involved the important formation of numerous links between the Catholic Committee and Irish Protestant communities. Two of the most significant alliances that were cemented between Irish Catholics and Protestants at this time included the relationship between the Committee and Henry Grattan and his Irish Whig party and the relationship between Committee and T. Wolfe Tone, who helped to encourage stronger ties between northern Dissenters and Dublin Catholics.

Henry Grattan and his Irish Whig associates maintained very close contacts with the Catholic Committee throughout the summer of 1792. They held numerous meetings, offered political guidance to the Catholics, and contributed to the creation of innovative political tactics including the formation of a public, representative Catholic convention. Dennis Kennedy has explained that:

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

The liberal faction of the Whig Club responded favourably to these pleas for the suffrage from the Catholic Committee and were willing to strengthen the popular interest by yielding up part of the Protestant Ascendancy. They took an optimistic view of the possibility of settling old antagonisms and perceived Catholic relief as the necessary basis for gradually incorporating all creeds and classes in a united nation.¹⁹

Several years later, these strong bonds continued to be evident when, at a meeting of the Catholics of Dublin on 27 February 1795, Grattan received a 'humble tribute of thanks and gratitude' after being named 'the deliverer of his country' and, also, being celebrated as 'mover of the Catholic bill [of 1795] ... endeavouring to inculcate the necessity of moderation and justice'.²⁰

Like Grattan, T. W. Tone became a crucial Irish Protestant ally and supporter of the Catholic cause after the appearance of his pamphlet, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, in which the Present State of the Country, and the Necessity of a Parliamentary Reform are Considered ... [by] A Northern Whig*, in which he called for the people of Ireland to 'unite with cordial sincerity, and demand a general Reform in Parliament, which shall include restitution of the elective franchise to the Catholics'.²¹ After his appointment as assistant secretary to the Committee in the spring of 1792, Tone exerted himself to help build this national Irish unity by introducing his Catholic associates to popular political activists in Protestant Ulster. Although John Keogh had been forced to admit to Richard Burke on 17 May 1792 that, 'as to the dispositions of our Northerners, I have made no attempt to know them – since that time at your desire I sounded one of their confidential people. His thoughts were reasonable and sound'.²²

¹⁹ D. Kennedy, 'The Irish Whigs, 1789-1793' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1971), p. 182.

²⁰ *Address of the Catholics of the City of Dublin, to the Right Honorable Henry Grattan, Presented by the Gentlemen Appointed for that Purpose at the Meeting in Francis Street Chapel, February the 27th, 1795* (Dublin, 1795) [single sheet only].

²¹ T. Wolfe Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, in which the Present State of the Country, and the Necessity of a Parliamentary Reform are Considered ... [by] A Northern Whig* (Dublin, 1791), p. 51.

²² Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2658 [John Keogh to Richard Burke, 17 May 1792].

Just over two months later, on 26 July 1792, Keogh was enthusiastically informing his Westminster correspondent, 'Belfast is decided on the Catholic question and its neighbourhood daily converting. Gentlemen who opposed us last year are now among our warmest advocates'.²³ Keogh went on to describe the strong support shown for the Catholic cause at the enormous Volunteer meeting held during the Bastille Day celebrations and to emphasise the contributions of Protestant clergymen:

Three Presbyterian clergymen were our ablest advocates. Two sermons in separate Meeting Houses were preached next day in our favour and their hearers sent deputations to request their ministers to preach the same sermons the ensuing Sunday.²⁴

Even when discussing the disturbing, sectarian conflict between the Protestant Peep O' Day Boys and the Catholic Defenders at Rathfriland, Keogh described the Catholic Committee's cooperation with local Protestant gentlemen, who attended a public meeting and informed Keogh that the '[Catholic] clergy had lost their former influence, but that the Committee was looked up to by the Catholics'.²⁵ After paying a compliment by showing respect for the authority of the Catholic Committee, these same Protestant gentlemen 'assured us of their influence with the [poor] Protestants'.²⁶ Rather than expressing anti-Protestant sentiments in this letter, Keogh primarily portrayed a spirit of cooperation and tolerance. Overall, therefore, Keogh was pleased to report to Burke, that 'the people of Belfast, considered as traders, are very informed men, cool, reflecting and determined, friends to justice and to liberty'.²⁷

Once again, the Catholic Committee's optimistic expectations of support were disturbed by virulent opposition in the form of the Grand Jury resolutions, which

²³ Ibid., [John Keogh to Richard Burke, 26 July 1792].

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

poured into Dublin from Protestant-led Grand Juries in the summer of 1792. The Catholic Committee, along with the county Catholic organisations, responded with determined outrage to these resolutions, publishing responses, and convening public meetings during the autumn months in order to uphold and defend the Catholic cause. Although Catholic activists became outspoken in their own defence, however, they never adopted or expressed a hostile or anti-Protestant bias. The Roman Catholics of the city and county of Waterford were prompt to declare on 22 September that 'in this part of the kingdom, a perfectly amicable intercourse has long subsisted between the members of the different religious persuasions'.²⁸ The Waterford Catholics went on to assert that these bonds were 'too firmly established to be interrupted by the calumnies of interested men, who endeavour to alienate from us the confidence of our Protestant brethren'.²⁹ In County Cork, the Roman Catholics addressed the Irish public and their 'Protestant friends and neighbours', simply to express their 'astonishment' over 'the spirit of intolerance observable ... in an age which is denominated enlightened'.³⁰ Similarly, the Roman Catholics of Tipperary respectfully asked their 'Protestant brethren, not to construe that [Protestant] ascendancy so as to oppose it to their own true interests, the general welfare of the state and to the relief of a large body of unoffending subjects,'³¹ while the Roman Catholics of Galway reiterated their belief that 'the prosperity of Ireland depends upon the union of its inhabitants'.³² Finally, in

²⁸ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/34/68 [*A Declaration of Political Sentiments Published by the Roman Catholics of the City and Vicinity of Waterford in Answer to the Resolutions Entered into by the Different Grand Juries at the Summer Assizes, 1792*].

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *Declaration at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the County and City of Cork, Convened by Public Advertisement and Held at the Cork Tavern the 15th of October, 1792* (Cork, 1792), p. 2.

³¹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/279 [*Roman Catholic Inhabitants of Tipperary*], 2 October 1792].

³² Francis Plowden, *An Historical Review of the State of Ireland* (London, 1813), p. 196 [*Galway Roman Catholics at a Numerous and Respectable Meeting of the Roman Catholic Inhabitants of the Town and County of Galway, October 14, 1792*].

County Sligo, before asserting the justice of the Catholic cause, the Roman Catholics offered an apology outright to their Protestant neighbours:

If in stating our sentiments, we have given offence to any man or body of men amongst our Protestant brethren, we sincerely regret it and shall be always truly concerned when we fail in conciliating their affections or procuring their concurrence in our political pursuits.³³

These county expressions of unity and amity between Irish Protestants and Catholics were echoed in Dublin at the important Catholic meeting on Wednesday, 31 October 1792. The participants at this gathering were primarily responding to the controversial *Letter of the Corporation of Dublin*, which had helped to define the meaning of the term 'Protestant Ascendancy' by claiming that 'every Irish Protestant has an interest in the government of this kingdom' and that 'experience has taught us that, without the ruin of the Protestant establishment, the Catholic cannot be allowed the smallest influence in the state'.³⁴ Despite this provocation, however, the Catholic speakers reiterated their calls for union and their beliefs in the good-will of their Protestant allies. Keogh insisted that the Grand Jury resolutions had 'called forth many and able defenders among our Protestant brethren'.³⁵ He explained his view that 'the Protestants of Ireland are not our oppressors' and he cited the support of the citizens of Belfast, the Society of United Irishmen, the Volunteers, and the Protestants of Cork and Wexford.³⁶ Similarly, Randall MacDonnell was able to call the attention of the assembled crowd 'to our illustrious friends in both Houses of Parliament; to the Protestants of Cork and Wexford; to our patriotic Societies; to the town of Belfast, and

³³ National Library of Ireland, O'Hara Papers, MS 36, 393/3 ['*Sligo Catholic Meeting – September 1, 1792*'].

³⁴ *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, duly convened on Wednesday, October 31, 1792, at the Exhibition-Room, Exchequer-Street. With the Letter of the Corporation of Dublin, to the Protestants of Ireland* (Dublin, 1792), p. 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Volunteers of Ulster' as examples of the Irish Protestant liberal spirit, which had demonstrated sympathy for the Catholic cause.³⁷ Finally, Dr. Ryan stated that 'it is in the interest of the Catholics and Protestants to unite'.³⁸ Although Thomas Bartlett has described these statements as merely 'conciliatory',³⁹ they were consistent with the sentiments expressed by the Catholic Committee throughout its long campaign, which never indicated any sectarian biases, and they were made in conjunction with strong denunciations of the actions of the 'few monopolists' installed at Dublin Castle.⁴⁰

Finally, this Irish Catholic liberal tolerance was evident during the great Catholic convention at the end of 1792, as well as in the Catholic Committee's resolutions of 1793. Tone's account of the convention cited repeated calls for union with Irish Protestants, 'every sentence in favour of union meets with the most favourable reception', as well as giving recognition to the Protestant supporters in parliament and to the citizens of Belfast.⁴¹ W. J. MacNeven stated that, 'I expect much from the friendship of our Protestant brethren',⁴² and in his retrospective he also noted the existence of a Protestant delegate to the convention, Major Edward Sweetman, 'the representative which [County Wexford] chose, [who] proved himself ... every way worthy of the trust'.⁴³ Similarly, in January 1793, while Keogh and the Catholic deputation were still at Westminster, the Catholic Committee in Dublin demonstrated amity by officially declaring:

³⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

³⁹ Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830*, p. 151.

⁴⁰ *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, Wednesday, October 31, 1792*, p. 38 [John Keogh].

⁴¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 228 [4 December 1792] & 85.

⁴² *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, with the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793).

⁴³ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 40.

That all animosity between Protestants and Catholics should cease and lie buried in the graves of their ancestors; that inhabiting one common country and adoring the same God, the united charities of religion and country may melt us down into one people and forever establish a reciprocity of interests and a community of rights. The Committee trust that the Catholics of Ireland never will, nor ever can forget their obligations to their Protestant brethren, who have stood forward as their advocates and protectors.⁴⁴

These non-sectarian views were later repeated by Doctor Ryan during the final session of the expanded general assembly of the Catholic Committee in April 1793. Theobald McKenna also believed that the time had arrived for the people of Ireland to unite and become 'heartily coalesced and blended'.⁴⁵ Finally, Hugh Hamill emphasised the need 'to show our Protestant brethren that we have not deserted them' over the cause of reform by stating: 'nothing can effectuate complete emancipation but union with our Protestant brethren'.⁴⁶

These tolerant, liberal and pro-Protestant attitudes, which were entertained and displayed by all of the leading members of the Catholic Committee, were not merely political rhetoric, intended to sway and conciliate Irish Protestant opinion. They were a logical adjunct to the Committee's overriding and certain belief in the obstructionist, anti-Catholicism of the Irish administration. The Catholic Committee was able to maintain its faith in the good-will of Protestant Ireland by constructing this belief system, in which only a small though influential faction in Ireland was opposed to granting Catholic relief.

This view had developed primarily towards the end of 1791, near the time of the Kenmarite schism, and may have been started or promoted by either John Keogh or Richard Burke at Westminster, who mistakenly assigned full blame for the Kenmarite

⁴⁴ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 315 ['Address Agreed to at a Meeting of the Sub-committee of the Catholics of Ireland, on 2nd January 1793'].

⁴⁵ Theobald McKenna, *Substance of the Arguments offered to the General Meeting of Roman Catholics, April 22, 1793, on the Question Whether the Meeting should then be Dissolved* (Dublin, 1793), p. 4.

⁴⁶ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 265.

secession to the machinations of Dublin Castle. These beliefs were then later reinforced during the turbulent Irish parliament of 1792, which granted only limited Catholic relief and included numerous incidents of public disrespect for the Irish Catholic Committee. By May 1792, Keogh was already expressing the opinion that 'we see our slavery resolved on by the men in power who are also averse to change'.⁴⁷ The summer arrival of the anti-Catholic Grand Jury resolutions further supported these beliefs, leading Keogh to cite 'the desperate and unprincipled proceedings of certain monopolists'.⁴⁸ Keogh credited these monopolists, some of whom he specifically named, with encouraging the sectarian violence between Protestant Peep O' Day Boys and Catholic Defenders in Ulster and, also, with using armed military force to intimidate poor Catholics:

If [British] ministers now think fit to interfere ... to desire the speaker [John Foster] to restrain his zeal for peace by alarming the country people at their [religious] patrons - to order the Beresfords to withhold their nephew, Lord Annesley, from arming the Protestant weavers and peasants.⁴⁹

Overall, therefore, throughout 1792, Keogh and the Irish Catholic Committee consistently attributed the source of anti-Catholic discrimination and the obstruction of the Catholic cause not to the Protestants of Ireland in general, but to the small party of Irish Protestants in power at Dublin Castle, who sought to extend their influence and who resolutely refused to 'abate one jot of their petty tyrannies here'.⁵⁰ Richard Burke stated these beliefs concisely by explaining to William Drennan: 'this Protestant

⁴⁷ Sheffield Archives, WWM Burke Papers 1/2658 [John Keogh to Richard Burke, 17 May 1792].

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1/2668 [John Keogh to Richard Burke, 26 July 1792].

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

ascendancy is in reality a faction which have intruded themselves into the government of the country, against both King and people, and are resolved to keep it'.⁵¹

These strongly-held views were echoed in the speeches and pamphlets which the Committee published at the end of 1792. At the meeting of the Catholics of Dublin on 31 October 1792, Keogh bluntly stated 'when we speak of our oppressors, strike out the term *Protestants* and substitute *monopolists*'.⁵² He then explained that 'three or four families of monopolists find it convenient to hold in slavery three or four millions of faithful subjects' and, furthermore, that the Catholics of Ireland had been 'goaded to tumult, by every insult, neglect, and contempt from the Government in Ireland'.⁵³ In the Committee's December pamphlet, *A Vindication of the Conduct and Principles of the Catholics of Ireland, From the Charges Made Against Them, by Certain Grand Juries, and Other Interested Bodies in that Country ... on December 3, 1792*, accusations were made claiming that Dublin Castle had exercised direct control over the county Grand Juries and that in the counties of Louth, Limerick, Leitrim, Cork and Roscommon, the Grand Juries were either led or overseen by men receiving remuneration from the government. In this publication these individuals were described as being 'high in the confidence of their sovereign and armed with all the influence of station and office'.⁵⁴ Also, writing in his retrospective several years later, W. J. MacNeven expressed similar beliefs and explained that the resolutions of the Corporation of Dublin and other Grand Juries:

⁵¹ Jean Agnew (ed.), *The Drennan – McTier Letters*, i (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1998), p. 413 [William Drennan to Sam McTier, 15 September 1792].

⁵² *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, Wednesday, October 31, 1792*, p. 37.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 47 & 38.

⁵⁴ *A Vindication of the Conduct and Principles of the Catholics of Ireland, From the Charges Made Against Them, by Certain Grand Juries, and Other Interested Bodies in that Country ... on December 3, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 14.

... seemed to be made with the immediate sanction of government, in as much as the most confidential servants of the crown, and even its ministers, stepped forward to give them countenance and support in their respective counties.⁵⁵

Further evidence may exist to support the Catholic Committee's claim that Dublin Castle had been responsible for promoting conflict between the communities of Ireland along religious and sectarian lines in the 1790s. James Kelly has demonstrated that the term *Protestant Ascendancy* became commonplace in Ireland in the 1780s and W. J. McCormick has claimed that the phrase first entered Castle correspondence in January 1792.⁵⁶ At the Catholic meeting in Dublin on 23 March 1792, John Keogh said that the term 'Protestant Ascendancy ... was never heard of till 1792'.⁵⁷ Similarly, in October 1792, Doctor Ryan claimed that the words '*Protestant Ascendancy*, like the cabala, are used as a magic term to keep back the reason, to suppress the justice and to alarm the fears of our Protestant countrymen'.⁵⁸

These statements, therefore, demonstrate that the Irish Catholic Committee did not consider all of the Protestants of Ireland to be their enemies and its members were very careful to avoid inciting religious conflict. The Committee members questioned the existence of a Protestant Ascendancy, a concept which they believed to have been specifically invented and promoted by their enemies in Dublin Castle in order to hinder their cause. They appealed to the tolerance and reason of their Irish Protestant neighbours, hoping they would reject this biased and prejudiced invention and grant

⁵⁵ W. J. MacNeven, *Pieces of Irish History Illustrative of the Condition of the Catholics of Ireland, of the Origin and Progress of the Political System of the United Irishmen and of their Transactions with the Anglo-Irish Government*, p. 34.

⁵⁶ James Kelly, 'The Genesis of Protestant Ascendancy. The Rightboy Disturbances of the 1780s and Their Impact upon Protestant Opinion' in *Parliament, Politics and People in Eighteenth-Century Irish History*, (ed.) Gerard O'Brien (Dublin: Irish Academic Press Ltd, 1989), pp. 101-113.

⁵⁷ *A Report of the Debate which Took Place at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at the Music-Hall, Fishamble Street, Friday, March 23, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 16.

⁵⁸ *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, duly convened on Wednesday, October 31, 1792, at the Exhibition-Room, Exchequer Street. With the letter of the Corporation of Dublin, to the Protestants of Ireland* (Dublin, 1792), p. 10.

them legislative relief. Writing nearly ten years later, James Edward Devereux continued to espouse these views in a publication entitled, *Observations on the Factions Which Have Ruled Ireland; on the Calumnies Thrown upon the People of the Country, and the Necessity of Restoring to the Catholics Their Political Rights*, wherein he reflected on the events of the early 1790s and described the moment when:

A curious nondescript, unknown to the genuine spirit of the Constitution as established at the [Glorious] Revolution, the *Protestant Ascendancy* was now pompously brought forward: the hacks of the [government] faction were dispatched in every direction, and to every corner of Ireland, to make converts to the worship of this new creature of their brain.⁵⁹

It is not the aim of this dissertation, however, to determine the accuracy of the Catholic Committee's claims. Certain eighteenth-century Irish contemporaries and modern historians, such as A. P. W. Malcomson, have disputed the Committee's strongly-held beliefs in order to argue that 'the composition of the Louth Grand Jury of 1792 shows that it had not been packed ... Not one of these men, or of the whole eleven, was amenable to Foster's political influence'.⁶⁰ Regardless of eighteenth-century reality or modern historical investigation, however, John Keogh and the Catholic Committee of Ireland persisted in believing that their political movement was being opposed by only a small party of 'interested' Irish Protestant government officials, who refused to abandon their monopoly of power at Dublin Castle. This overriding assumption affected the Committee's entire political campaign, encouraging its members to speak out against this biased faction and to seek alliances with the tolerant Protestants of Ireland, who had suffered equally under the Irish government and had professed sympathy for the Catholic cause. Overall, therefore, despite its

⁵⁹ James Edward Devereux, *Observations on the Factions Which Have Ruled Ireland; on the Calumnies Thrown upon the People of the Country, and the Necessity of Restoring to the Catholics Their Political Rights* (London, 1801), p. 99.

⁶⁰ A. P. W. Malcomson, *John Foster: The Politics of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy*, p. 231.

efforts to gain political rights for the Catholics, the Irish Catholic Committee of the 1790s cannot be considered anti-Protestant and the Irish Catholic campaign should not be interpreted as a sectarian contest. The Committee members themselves would have vociferously rejected such an interpretation of their motives and their political activities.

II

Radical ?

A different interpretation of the Irish Catholic Committee's political campaign from 1790 to 1793, which is diametrically opposed to a strictly sectarian approach, has involved applying radical motives and methods to the movement. Modern historians investigating the popular radical societies of Ireland in the 1790s have drawn the Catholic Committee into their studies, establishing connections and highlighting similarities between the Committee and contemporary radical organisations. The current, ongoing interest in the radical Society of United Irishmen has made this trend common; and it is especially well exemplified both by Jim Smyth's, *The Men of No Property, Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* and Marianne Elliott's *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*.

The Societies of United Irishmen of Belfast and Dublin were founded in the latter half of 1791, roughly at the same time that the publication of the *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin* provoked unprecedented controversy and initiated a new era in Irish Catholic activism. Because these developments occurred concurrently and the two movements coexisted, Smyth has claimed that the United Irishmen became the

‘campaigning partner of the Committee’.⁶¹ To further develop this theory of popular cooperation, Smyth also asserts that, ‘the crucial innovations of the Catholic Committee’s campaign of 1791–1793 were the alliances with the radical dissenters and the mobilisation of a mass movement’.⁶² Finally, while acknowledging the absence of solid evidence, Smyth emphasises and alludes to the existence of a political network in Ireland, which involved the Catholic Committee in radical tactics and violent methods:

While insufficient evidence exists ... to support a grand Catholic Committee - United Irish - Defender conspiracy, such as that posited by Musgrave, there is enough to suggest a network of contacts. Possibly these were established as insurance against the danger of armed conflict.⁶³

Marianne Elliott has also attempted to link the two popular organisations. She has stated that Catholic activists developed sympathy for the United Irish cause and that, ‘the number of advanced Catholics who joined the United Irishmen is significant’.⁶⁴ Moreover, Elliott has made the sweeping claims that, ‘most of the Catholic activists were also United Irishmen and frequently the most militant at society meetings’ and that, ‘the growing militancy of the Catholics was indisputable’.⁶⁵

Although there are certain connections which modern historians of eighteenth-century Ireland could draw between these organisations, it may not be entirely accurate or helpful to place the Catholic Committee itself within such a radical framework. The Catholic Committee never officially provided support for the Society of United Irishmen or expressed approval for radical tactics in general. As part of a larger policy of gaining political allies and raising support for the Catholic cause throughout Ireland,

⁶¹ Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property, Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1992), p. 58.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶⁴ Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 151.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171 & p. 188.

the Catholic Committee established numerous connections between 1791 and 1793. Radical northern Dissenters and other popular political groups constituted only some of these alliances. By solely emphasising radical affiliations, however, Smyth fails to strike a fair balance and neglects all of the other traditional and moderate alliances that the Irish Catholic Committee also formed after 1790. Furthermore, although certain members of the Catholic Committee did join and display an interest in the cause of the United Irishmen, Elliott's numerical claims are supported neither by the eighteenth-century accounts of United Irish leaders, such as William Drennan and Thomas Russell, nor by the printed accounts of United Irish meetings before 1795 contained in R. B. McDowell's, *Proceedings of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen*. In these three separate records, a relatively small number of catholic leaders are cited by name, including Theobald McKenna, Richard McCormick, W. J. MacNeven, Thomas Warren, Dr. Thomas Ryan, John Sweetman, Capt. Edward Sweetman, T. W. Tone, and John Keogh.

In addition to the eight names contained in the three eighteenth-century accounts, Smyth has specifically claimed that before 1795 four additional leading Committee members were either United Irishmen or radical sympathisers, namely, Myles Keon, Charles O'Connor, Christopher D. Bellew, and Luke Teeling.⁶⁶ Smyth has also stated that, 'of the 231 elected delegates to the Catholic convention, 48 were members of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen'.⁶⁷ Despite early activity to promote the Society of United Irishmen in Connaught in 1791 and to initiate an exchange of public addresses between the Roscommon and Leitrim Catholics and the radical First Belfast Volunteer Company, John O'Donovan has claimed that Keon and

⁶⁶ 1795 is a critical year, which witnessed the recall of Earl Fitzwilliam, the government's abandonment of further Catholic relief and an historically unprecedented drift towards radicalism.

⁶⁷ Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property, Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1992), p. 75.

O'Connor later withdrew 'when constitutional agitation was replaced by revolutionary conspiracy'.⁶⁸ Similarly, Christopher Dillon Bellew is described by Smyth as being representative of a radical 'pressure group within the Committee' simply because he was responsible for proposing a direct transmission of the Irish Catholic petition to Westminster, a claim without any additional justification.⁶⁹ Luke Teeling, however, may provide the strongest support for Smyth's belief in the 'radical penetration of Catholic politics' by an 'organised pressure group'.⁷⁰

Luke Teeling of Antrim had a profound impact on the Irish Catholic movement by introducing a call for total Catholic emancipation into the debates at the Catholic convention on 3 December 1792. Although he was not specifically listed among the members of the Belfast Society of United Irishmen, he had a close affiliation with northern radicals. Marianne Elliot has claimed that Teeling had forged an alliance with the United Irishmen by 1792 and that his son, Charles Teeling, was instrumental in allying the Defenders with the United Irishmen.⁷¹ In addition, T. W. Tone's record contains a vague reference to a meeting of Belfast Dissenters on 21 November 1792, which was followed one day later by the transmission of 'instructions' to Teeling as well as a second meeting, called by Teeling at a local inn to sound general public opinion.⁷² Largely as a result of these events, Luke Teeling was able to proclaim at the December Catholic convention that, 'his instructions from his constituents were to require nothing short of emancipation'.⁷³

⁶⁸ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 303.

⁶⁹ Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property, Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*, p. 75.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, p. 237.

⁷² William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 221 & 77. Tone has mentioned the presence of leading United Irishman, Samuel Neilson at the 21 November meeting.

⁷³ Ibid., i, 77.

Although Teeling's actions and his call for complete emancipation indicate evidence of his being influenced by radical ideas, they do not provide unequivocal proof of a Catholic Committee alliance with the Society of United Irishmen. Instead, they demonstrate that liberal views were prevalent among certain popular organisations in North-East Ulster and they suggest the close contact that existed between these political activists in the early 1790s. Additionally, this example of radical infiltration, which appeared at the end of 1792, ultimately failed to generate the desired emancipation. Two of the most significant rewards in the Catholic Relief Act of 1793 were the parliamentary franchise and equal participation on juries, the primary concerns of the moderate Catholic sub-committee, while Teeling's aim of total emancipation was delayed for over two decades. Overall, therefore, although this incident may provide an isolated example of radicalism in Catholic politics, Luke Teeling may be representative merely of the political networks within Ulster and the tolerance and interconnectedness of Belfast's popular political culture. Teeling did not contribute to nor did he participate in the tactical decisions within the Catholic sub-committee and his lone influence at the December convention, subsequently, failed to have any significant impact on the extent of Catholic relief granted in 1793.

The Catholic leaders and convention delegates specifically named in the eighteenth-century accounts might provide more reliable evidence of Smyth's purported network of contacts. Theobald McKenna, however, as has been shown, altered his affiliations drastically between the summer of 1791 and 1792. Possibly succumbing to fears over the growing instability created by the French Revolution, McKenna had retreated politically by the middle of 1792, insisting in October that the revolution was 'tarnished with ferocity and degenerating, in the opinion of many persons, into licentiousness, [it] rather deters moderate men from giving their sanction

to popular proceedings'.⁷⁴

Moreover, before 1795, the purported United Irish affiliation of leading sub-committee member John Keogh can be disputed. Tommy Graham has questioned the information supplied by informant Samuel Turner, noting a lapse of five months between a reported United Irish meeting and his submission of pertinent intelligence to Dublin Castle. In addition, Graham has recognised specific inaccuracies and has accused Turner of harbouring an anti-Catholic bias:

The refusal of Dublin leaders to rise (particularly the Catholic ones) ... had embittered Turner and induced an anti-Catholic reaction ... Turner may have deliberately overemphasised Catholic involvement in order to implicate more respectable Catholic Committee types like Keogh and Braughall.⁷⁵

This suggestion is also reinforced by Karen Harvey, who claims that 'Keogh never officially joined the United Irishmen',⁷⁶ and by evidence in volume four of the *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, published in 1841, which contains the statement, 'Keogh distrusted Tone and had refused to become an United Irishman. He wished to steer the Catholics clear of that rock and, hence, Tone never forgave him'.⁷⁷ Keogh and Tone's split in 1793 was sufficiently famous to have been reported by George Knox in his letter to Lord Abercorn on 6 February: 'Tone and Keogh have quarrelled. Keogh says [Tone] thwarted him and wanted to

⁷⁴ Theobald McKenna, *Address to the Roman Catholics of Ireland Relative to the Proceedings During the Summer of 1792 and on the Means and Practicability of a Tranquil Emancipation* (Dublin, October 1792), p. 15.

⁷⁵ Tommy Graham, 'The Shift in United Irish Leadership from Belfast to Dublin, 1796 – 1798' in *Revolution, Counter Revolution and Union, Ireland in the 1790s*, (ed.) Jim Smyth, p. 63.

⁷⁶ Karen J. Harvey, *The Bellews of Mount Bellew: A Catholic Gentry Family in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, p. 170.

⁷⁷ Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 2-3.

push the Catholics into a union with Belfast'.⁷⁸ Tone himself also expressed dissatisfaction with John Keogh and described his proposal on 25 January 1793 to send people to the Volunteer Convention at Dungannon as 'a hollow gesture with no sincerity as sub-committee have no authority or power and they wouldn't agree to [the] measure anyway'.⁷⁹ Finally, Danny Mansergh strongly supports the theory of Keogh's continued political moderation by describing events in 1793-4: 'The Catholic delegates, torn between their parliamentary and their radical friends, chose to secure the parliamentary alliance by eschewing continued out-of-doors campaigning'.⁸⁰

These multiple examples tend to refute the charges made by unreliable Castle informants regarding Keogh's alleged participation in the Society of United Irishmen. These informants may have offered the Irish government Keogh's name because of his already high public profile. Alternatively, like Myles Keon and Charles O'Connor, Keogh may have had an early flirtation with the United Irishmen before later withdrawing as that movement became increasingly radical and revolutionary. This theory may be supported by the description of a curious incident contained in detail in Denis Gwynn's biography, *John Keogh*, in which Keogh is called upon to preside at a United Irish meeting:

⁷⁸ Anthony Malcolmson, *Catholic Emancipation, 1793-1829* [insert, George Knox to Marquess of Abercorn, 6 February 1793].

⁷⁹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 243.

⁸⁰ Danny Mansergh, *Grattan's Failure: Parliamentary Opposition and the People in Ireland 1779-1800* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005), p. 168.

Keogh, on taking the chair, called for a list of the members who were to attend. After some time a gentleman, known to be a United Irishman, but whose name was not on the list, entered the room and took part in the proceedings. Keogh became uneasy; he beckoned to [Richard] McCormick and desired him to inquire why persons attended the meeting who had not been invited. The latter made an inquiry and brought back word that the gentleman was the friend of one of those who had been invited. Keogh was not satisfied. Another gentleman was brought in under similar circumstances. Keogh then whispered to McCormick, 'Dick, men's lives are not safe with fellows who would act in this manner' and in the course of a few minutes he pleaded an engagement and quitted the meeting and from that time never attended one.⁸¹

This unsubstantiated, but extremely explicit, account of an episode at an early meeting of the Society of United Irishmen may offer a solution to the conflicting theories regarding John Keogh's possible participation in the radical organisation, but it does not support the claims of modern historians that Keogh was an active member of the United Irishmen before 1795, was responsible for forming political connections and introduced radical tactics into the Catholic Committee. Neither does it support the misleading statement that 'the radical clique, which from 1790 dominated the Catholic Committee was led by Keogh'.⁸²

In strong contrast to Keogh, whose exact involvement with the United Irishmen cannot be proven between 1790 and 1793, the Sweetmans, Warren, Ryan, MacNeven, McCormick and Tone are acknowledged to have been fully contributing members of the Society. Capt. Edward Sweetman, a Protestant landowner from County Wexford, was a significant participant at the Catholic convention, but was only introduced to the Catholic sub-committee in the autumn of 1792 and subsequently was never invited into the group nor did he exert influence over their decisions. Thomas Warren's name appears consistently throughout the Minute Book of the Catholic

⁸¹ Denis Gwynn, *John Keogh*, pp. 65-66.

⁸² Charles Chenevix Trench, *Grace's Card, Irish Catholic Landlords, 1690 - 1800* (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1997), p. 277.

Committee, but we have little evidence of his contribution to Catholic policy and no political tactics have ever been attributed to him. After appearing in the Minute Book, John Sweetman's name becomes especially prominent in Tone's records only in 1793, when he becomes one of Tone's few allies who refused to agree to Hobart's bill for partial Catholic relief. Dr. Thomas Ryan and W. J. MacNeven were both outspoken, vocal, and involved members of the Catholic Committee, who were, by the end of 1792, repeatedly calling for cooperation between Catholics and Protestants to bring about parliamentary reform. Their radicalism must have been limited before 1793, however, as neither of them sided with Tone in opposing the government's bill. Instead, Dr. Ryan wisely insisted on meeting in April 1793 'to congratulate each other on what we have got'.⁸³

Similarly, W. J. MacNeven's name appears in the Catholic Committee Minute Book for the first time on 9 February 1791, but does not reappear again until 31 December 1791, suggesting that he did not hold a position of importance or confidence within the Catholic sub-committee throughout 1791.⁸⁴ Although he was chosen by ballot to sit on the new sub-committee of twelve for three months on 14 April 1792,⁸⁵ as Eamon O'Flaherty has accurately observed, for unknown reasons MacNeven was not selected to remain on the Catholic sub-committee in the summer elections of 1792.⁸⁶ Despite remaining active and outspoken throughout the remainder of 1792 by participating in the Catholic Meeting of Dublin on 31 October and the Catholic convention, therefore, W. J. MacNeven was not involved in the important sub-

⁸³ Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1998), p. 213 [16 April 1793].

⁸⁴ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 120.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167 & E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 143.

committee debates of January and February 1793 and, subsequently, exerted little influence over Catholic policy or the decisions made within the Catholic sub-committee during that crucial period.

Like his associates in the sub-committee of the Catholic Committee, Richard McCormick was an educated member of the merchant class, whose name appears several times in the *Proceedings of the Dublin Society of United Irishmen* during the years 1792 and 1793. David Dickson has stated that McCormick was a manufacturer with workshops in Dublin and Limerick,⁸⁷ while Jim Smyth has explained that McCormick employed nearly 200 workers in 1780 and was listed as a 'master manufacturer in single and double worsted', in the Report of the Grand Committee on Trade.⁸⁸ In addition, Eamon O'Flaherty has described McCormick as 'an intelligent man', who had served as a field major alongside Keogh in the Volunteers and was known to be 'violent and was, among others, determinedly American mad'.⁸⁹

Throughout his diary, Tone refers to Richard McCormick, frequently expressing his personal admiration and stating his opinion that McCormick made important contributions to the Catholic Committee. In one passage, Tone claimed that Keogh and McCormick were 'the two men I most esteemed and who had, in their respective capacities, the greatest influence on that body'.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, however, Tone's potentially biased view of McCormick's significance to the Catholic Committee cannot be corroborated by other evidence. Although his name appears consistently in the Catholic Committee Minute Book as secretary from the start of 1790 until the final

⁸⁷ D. Dickson, 'Catholics and Trade in 18th Century Ireland – An Old Debate Revisited' in *Endurance and Emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century*, (ed.) T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), p. 97.

⁸⁸ Jim Smyth, 'Dublin's Political Underground in the 1790s' in *Parliament, Politics and People in Eighteenth-Century Irish History*, (ed.) Gerard O'Brien (Dublin: Irish Academic Press Ltd, 1989), p. 130.

⁸⁹ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 105.

⁹⁰ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 63.

entry in July 1792 and Tone has mentioned McCormick's attendance at Belfast's Bastille Day celebrations in the summer of 1792, no other contribution to Committee tactics in 1791 or 1792 has been recorded. He is not listed as a speaker at either Dublin Catholic meeting in March or October 1792; he made no significant statements during the Catholic convention in December; and he did not publish any of his own political pamphlets. Similarly, he was not among the Catholic Committee members who met with Chief Secretary Hobart in November 1791; he did not travel to Westminster with either Keogh or the Catholic deputation; and, other than visiting Belfast in July, Tone has not mentioned that McCormick travelled throughout Ireland to promote the Committee's plan for elections in 1792. No contemporary account has attributed the formation of any Committee measure to McCormick and, like both W. J. MacNeven and John Sweetman, his ultimate influence over the sub-committee may have been negligible and limited before 1793.

McCormick's name does not become truly prominent in Tone's diary until the heated debates of early 1793, after the sub-committee began to split. Tone stated that, on 21 January, both he and McCormick advocated writing a strongly-worded letter to Hobart hinting 'at the danger of trifling', an action which was never taken.⁹¹ On 6 February, Tone and McCormick met to 'express outrage against Keogh' and, on 8 February, McCormick was recorded by Tone as successfully 'removing' Keogh and his exclusive clique, the 'Septemviri', and reinstating himself within the Catholic sub-committee.⁹² In a vote taken on that same day, McCormick was listed among the Catholic sub-committee members opposed to compromising with Hobart or accepting the government's grant of limited relief, while on 18 April, during the second assembly of the expanded General Committee of the Catholic Committee, McCormick criticised

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 248.

the actions of his associates by accusing certain other Committee members of acting 'without sanction ... in giving [the Catholic] petition [of 1793] to Hobart, knowing he wouldn't support [the] prayer [of the petition]'.⁹³

These events suggest that, alongside T. W. Tone, Richard McCormick was sidelined and excluded from any influence within the Catholic sub-committee in the early months of 1793. As one of Tone's few allies opposed to accepting the Catholic Relief bill of 1793, McCormick displayed a more radical inclination than the majority of his Catholic associates and, subsequently, became isolated and impotent, unable to influence Catholic policy or override the Committee's overwhelming desire for cooperation with Hobart and the Irish government. This evidence suggests that, far from injecting radicalism into the Irish Catholic Committee, Richard McCormick was a relatively powerless sub-committee member, who was eventually alienated by his former comrades and forced to pursue his own political objectives independent of the Committee.

Like Richard McCormick, W. J. MacNeven, and others, T. W. Tone became an important leader of the United Irishmen. Tone became renowned for his radical activity in the late 1790s. T. W. Tone's precise contribution to radical opinions within the Catholic movement, however, is equally uncertain. After joining the Committee in the late spring of 1792 in the official role of assistant secretary, Tone was well placed to influence Catholic policy through his close affiliation with Keogh, Byrne and the other Irish Catholic leaders. In addition, his personal connections to the Ulster Dissenters, Irish radical societies, and Irish officials greatly enhanced his potential contribution to the Catholic cause. He was extremely active throughout 1792 and he participated in every Catholic Committee scheme of that year, including travelling to promote the plan

⁹³ Ibid., p. 262.

for elections and accompanying the Catholic deputation to Westminster. In attempting to evaluate Tone's radical contribution to the Catholic Committee, however, his own explanation may be crucial:

In reviewing the conduct of my predecessor, Richard Burke, I saw that the rock on which he split was an overweening opinion of his own talents and judgement and a desire, which he had not art enough to conceal, of guiding, at his pleasure, the measures of the Committee. I, therefore, determined to model my conduct with the greatest caution in that respect; I seldom or never offered my opinion unless it was called for in the sub-committee, but contented myself with giving my sentiments without reserve in private to the two men I most esteemed and who had, in their respective capacities, the greatest influence on that body – I mean John Keogh and Richard McCormick.⁹⁴

In addition to accepting Tone's own admission that he merely advised Keogh and McCormick privately, never speaking before the entire assembled General Committee or pushing his own personal agenda within the Catholic sub-committee, Tone's political views may have been relatively moderate in 1792. In his pamphlet, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, in which the Present State of the Country, and the Necessity of a Parliamentary Reform are Considered*, first published in 1791, Tone stated, 'the King of England is King also of Ireland ... we love him as well, we are as faithful subjects'.⁹⁵ Furthermore, after calling for reform measures to limit the influence of the Irish executive; to strengthen the Irish electorate in the Irish parliament; and to extend the franchise to Roman Catholics, Tone proposed to 'extend the elective franchise to such Catholics only as have a freehold of £10 by the year'.⁹⁶ These statements demonstrate that, although Tone may have later embraced levelling principles, republican government, and revolutionary tactics, in 1791 and 1792 he was

⁹⁴ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 63.

⁹⁵ T. Wolfe Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, in which the Present State of the Country, and the Necessity of a Parliamentary Reform are Considered ... [by] A Northern Whig* (Dublin, 1791), p. 17.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

not yet an extreme or radical reformer. During the period of his involvement with the Irish Catholic Committee, therefore, he was not yet the advocate of the more radical and revolutionary ideologies generally attributed to him in his later years.

Finally, like Richard McCormick, T. W. Tone ultimately found himself at odds with the moderate Catholic activists in the Catholic sub-committee. In the early months of 1793, when the sub-committee split over the government's proposed bill for partial relief, Tone's more radical tendencies became apparent and contributed to the rift that developed between him and his former comrades. These differences may have existed throughout 1792, during the period of Tone's greatest participation in the Catholic campaign, but they had been suppressed for the greater good of the movement. He had frequently displayed discomfort over Keogh's insistence on securing clerical support for the Committee's measures and, on 27 August, expressed doubts over the Committee's commitment to the cause of legislative reform:

Grattan considers the Catholic question as but a means of advancing the general good – Right! But do the Catholics consider it so? The devil a bit, except one or two of them. [Keogh] says if they get franchise we shall see all they will do for reform. God send; but I, for one, doubt it.⁹⁷

When the relationships within the sub-committee became strained in January 1793, these philosophical differences became pronounced and clearly apparent, leading Tone to complain that 'as for merchants; I begin to see they are no great hands at revolutions'.⁹⁸ One month later he expressed his extreme disgust over the more moderate inclinations of his Catholic associates, 'Will the Catholics be satisfied with this bill? I believe they will, and be damned!'⁹⁹

⁹⁷ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 179.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, i, 241 [21 January 1793].

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, i, 247 [4 February 1793].

Like Richard McCormick, W. J. MacNeven and the other more radical Committee members, Tone was generally unable to affect the majority decisions of the Catholic Committee. He was simply overruled and, failing to inject his radicalism into the Committee, was ultimately forced to pursue his own political interests outside of the Catholic movement altogether. Overall, therefore, this very small group of Catholic activists with radical tendencies was neither numerous nor sufficiently powerful enough to overcome the more moderate beliefs prevalent in the Catholic Committee or to determine tactics within the Catholic sub-committee. They certainly failed in any attempt to form a solid alliance with the Society of United Irishmen, a measure that was never actually implemented by the Catholic Committee of Ireland.

In addition to recognising the inability of the more radical Committee members to affect policy, it is crucial to consider whether the measures that were enacted by the Catholic Committee should be placed within a radical framework. Before the Kenmarite secession of December 1791, the Committee was strongly influenced by the ultra-conservative Irish Catholic gentry and, therefore, was not remotely radical. In 1792, however, the Committee pursued new measures with an unprecedented vigour. Its primary objectives included obtaining legislative relief and the parliamentary franchise by building national political alliances, securing widespread political support, convincing legislators of its legitimacy to speak on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, and publicly demonstrating the obedience, loyalty and unity of Catholic Ireland.

To achieve these goals, the Committee formed a plan to hold national elections, promoted this plan widely, and, eventually, organised a great Catholic convention in Dublin. Myles Keon has generally been credited with devising the new plan for elections and, as a result of his early association with the Society of United Irishmen, the plan may be considered to be one isolated example of radical tactics being adopted

by the Catholic Committee. Although the measure seems comparatively democratic, however, the Committee actually only intended, first, to respond to the accusations of Irish MPs, who stated that the Catholic Committee was self-deputed and did not represent the wishes of the entire Catholic body, and, second, to improve the efficiency of the Committee by removing self-interested individuals, such as the Kenmarites, and improving communications with the county Catholic organisations. In contrast to the more radical language of the United Irishmen, therefore, the Committee's plan explicitly stated in a moderate tone:

The first great business which shall engage the General Committee, viz: an humble application to our gracious sovereign, submitting to him our loyalty and attachment, our obedience to the laws, a true statement of our situation ... and humbly beseeching that we may be restored the elective franchise.¹⁰⁰

These peaceful, law-abiding expressions reappeared consistently throughout all printed Catholic Committee publications. In the pamphlet, *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics, Randal McDonnell, Esq. in the Chair...Relating to a Circular Issued by the Sub-Committee "Erroneously Stated to be Illegal and Unconstitutional"* ... September 13, 1792, the Committee referred to 'their loyalty and attachment to their sovereign and obedience to the laws'.¹⁰¹ Similarly, in the December pamphlet, *Vindication of the Cause of the Catholics of Ireland, Adopted, and Ordered to be Published by the General Committee, at a Meeting Held at Taylor's*

¹⁰⁰ *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, Edward Byrne, Esq. in the Chair, Resolved - that the Following Letter be Circulated on May 26, 1792* (Dublin, 1792) [single sheet only]. By contrast, the Society of United Irishmen stated: 'In the present era of reform, when unjust governments are falling in every quarter of Europe ... when all government is acknowledged to originate from the people, and to be so far obligatory as it protects their rights and promotes their welfare ... We have no national government; we are ruled by Englishmen and the servants of Englishmen whose object is the interest of another country, whose instrument is corruption ... Such an extrinsic power ... can be resisted with effect solely by unanimity, decision and spirit in the people'. *Declaration and Resolutions of the Society of United Irishmen of Belfast* (Belfast, 1791).

¹⁰¹ *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics, Randal McDonnell, Esq. in the Chair...Relating to a Circular Issued by the Sub-Committee "Erroneously Stated to be Illegal and Unconstitutional"* ... September 13, 1792 (Dublin, 1792), p. 1.

Hall, Back-Lane, December 7, 1792, the Catholic Committee denied any intention of overawing the Irish parliament or encouraging violence: '[We] know too well how fatal to [Catholic] hopes of emancipation anything like disturbance must be ... It is more peculiarly [our] interest to preserve peace and good order than that of any body of men in the community'.¹⁰² Richard Burke also commented on the peaceful and loyal inclinations of the Irish Catholics in October 1792: 'The Catholics do not meditate any evil or ambitious design whatsoever general or particular'.¹⁰³ He later speculated that 'they are so perfectly pacific, that I am not sure they would even resist force with force'.¹⁰⁴ These peaceful and moderate tendencies are further evident in the Catholic Committee's address of January 1793, which urged the Catholics of Ireland to avoid the efforts of opponents 'to drive them into a violence derogatory to their unspotted character of loyalty and obedience to the laws'.¹⁰⁵ The resolutions of April 1793, also expressed the Committee's attachment to the Constitution:

The best medium between licentiousness and arbitrary power; possessing ... the capacity of improving and renovating itself, and, ... the means of counteracting the views of the incendiary, and the unfounded speculatist.¹⁰⁶

Although Jim Smyth claims that the Catholic convention had adopted 'assertive behaviour'; that 'the threat of violence, more or less implicit in the postures struck ... by the Committee, became more open'; and that 'the parliamentary reform campaign ... was similar to the Catholic one in two important respects: in its popular character and in its militant tone', the Catholic Committee was consistent in calling for peace and

¹⁰² *Vindication of the Cause of the Catholics of Ireland, Adopted, and Ordered to be Published by the General Committee, at a Meeting Held at Taylor's Hall, Back-Lane, December 7, 1792* (Dublin, 1793), p. 20.

¹⁰³ A. Cobban and R. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vi, 235-38 [Richard Burke to Earl Fitzwilliam, 6 October 1792].

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 315 [2 January 1793].

¹⁰⁶ *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 3.

showing respect for order.¹⁰⁷ Throughout all of its official publications the Catholic Committee never encouraged violence or radical tactics and always humbly referred to the loyalty it demonstrated to the crown, the constitution, and the established rule of law. In addition, during the Catholic convention a dignified decorum was consistently maintained, leading one Irish MP to commend the Committee's 'regard to constitutional forms and a solicitous desire to preserve inviolate, the public tranquillity'.¹⁰⁸ Finally, a particular respect for moderate and traditional methods was demonstrated by the Committee in deputing five Irish Catholic representatives to go to Westminster to present a loyal petition at the foot of the throne. These moderate, constitutional tactics, which were inconsistent with the radical and revolutionary ideologies of the later Society of United Irishmen, were also displayed by certain individual Catholic Committee members in their personal correspondence and were evident in the traditional political alliances which the Committee formed.

In an October 1792 publication, Theobald McKenna expressed his conservative belief that 'few political benefits are of sufficient value to be purchased by commotion'.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, writing in 1801, James Edward Devereux displayed his disgust at 'the detestable revolutionary faction of France'.¹¹⁰ John Keogh also stated strong critical opinions of the French revolutionaries in 1792, while describing his ongoing efforts at gaining the support of the Irish Catholic clergy for the Committee's plan for elections, an alliance which demonstrated a more traditional policy:

¹⁰⁷ Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property, Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*, pp. 75, 71 & 94.

¹⁰⁸ Nicholas Lee (ed.), *The Catholic Question in Ireland, 1762-1829*, ii, 335 [MP Francis Hutchinson, 27 February 1793].

¹⁰⁹ Theobald McKenna, *Political Essays Relative to the Affairs of Ireland, in 1791, 1792 and 1793* (London, 1794), p. 3.

¹¹⁰ James Edward Devereux, *Observations on the Factions Which Have Ruled Ireland; on the Calumnies Thrown upon the People of the Country, and the Necessity of Restoring to the Catholics Their Political Rights* (London, 1801), p. 95.

I have attended closely to your advice and endeavoured to create a confidence between our bishops and laity, in a very considerable degree I have succeeded, but old men used to bend to power, mistaking all attempts for liberty as something connected with the robbers and murders of France, it was indeed very difficult to get any aid from such men, yet some we obtained even from those and very active support from many others.¹¹¹

This moderate tactic of securing political alliances with Catholic religious leaders and Irish MPs was pursued throughout 1792, providing further evidence of the Catholic Committee's aversion to radicalism. The importance of clerical support was specifically expressed in the Committee's plan for elections: 'every endeavour should be used to cultivate and improve the friendship of our clergy ... The clergy being the natural guardians of morality, will undoubtedly co-operate with the laity'.¹¹² The Catholic Committee leaders assiduously followed their own advice, travelling throughout Ireland and holding numerous meetings with Catholic clerics to gain their assistance in implementing the plan for elections. T. P. Power has stated that in County Tipperary, 'the clergy played an important role in building up support locally for the Committee'.¹¹³ Similarly, an anti-Catholic, eighteenth-century eyewitness in County Cork has left an explicit description of one clerical contribution to the Catholic cause in a letter to Lord Lieutenant Westmorland:

¹¹¹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792]. Despite its apparent condemnation of the French revolutionaries, this quotation has resulted in many diverse and conflicting interpretations. For example, Jim Smyth has implied that Keogh is being insincere and sarcastic in his remarks: 'The contemptuous tone and caustic allusion (by a United Irishman) to the French Revolution suggest a self-confident, adroit politician'. It should also be observed that Keogh is writing to Reverend Hussey, an Irish Catholic cleric in London. Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property, Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*, p. 65.

¹¹² *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, Edward Byrne, Esq. in the Chair, Resolved - that the Following Letter be Circulated on May 26, 1792 (Dublin, 1792) [single sheet only].*

¹¹³ T. P. Power, *Land Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Tipperary*, p. 293.

A Mr. Scanlon, the Priest, insists on every Catholick signing it [a petition] and holds out the same insolent and audacious language that Mr. [Richard] Burke and Mr. Byrn[e] wish to inculcate ... I find the R[oman] Catholicks rely entirely on the Priest's orders to sign, for they have signed their names on a Roll of Parchment, and they are ignorant to what sort of a Petition their signatures are to be annexed.¹¹⁴

In addition to forming political alliances with religious leaders, the Catholic Committee was successful in securing the support of important Irish MPs, including Henry Grattan and the Irish Whig party. In contrast to the Committee's ambiguous relationship with the radical Society of United Irishmen, its association with the moderate, reformist Irish Whigs was consistent and invaluable from 1792. Both Keogh and Tone held several meetings with Grattan in 1792 to discuss tactics and the Irish Whigs are generally credited with proposing the plan for a publicly assembled Catholic convention in Dublin. Irish Catholic speakers and Catholic Committee pamphlets repeatedly expressed gratitude to these political supporters, including the official resolutions of April 1793, wherein thanks were given to the 'illustrious patriots' in the Irish Parliament.¹¹⁵ Finally, these crucial alliances outlasted the Catholic campaign of the early 1790s, cementing a bond between the Irish Whig reformers and Irish Catholic activists that lasted for at least twenty-five years, until Henry Grattan's death in 1820.

This conclusive aggregate evidence demonstrates that the tactics employed by the Irish Catholic Committee in its political campaign between 1790 and 1793 cannot be considered radical, but are more appropriately described as moderate. The small number of Committee members with proven radical sympathies were either placed outside of the Catholic sub-committee or, ultimately, lost their positions of influence and were unable to affect policy. Although the radical societies of Ireland were

¹¹⁴ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/353-354 [copy] [Richard Longfield to Westmorland, 3 October 1792].

¹¹⁵ *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 4.

undeniable supporters of the Catholic cause, this relationship may have been one-sided. Evidence of this inequality may have been demonstrated by the failure of the United Irish deputation to obtain entry to the Catholic convention. Karen Harvey has stated that, 'while the convention was in session a delegation from the Society with a resolution of support was not permitted to address it, but received politely in an antechamber'.¹¹⁶ Harvey has also attempted to clarify the relationship between the two organisations by explaining that:

The Catholic Committee could use the threat of an open union as leverage with the Irish government, but by keeping the Committee at a discreet distance from the United Irishmen ... appear in England as the reasonable moderate voice of a united Catholic body.¹¹⁷

This view is supported by Marianne Elliott, who states that 'eighteenth-century Catholic culture ... was not particularly anti-government and was entirely antithetical to the notions of democracy and individual rights unleashed by the French Revolution'.¹¹⁸ It was also expressed by the eighteenth-century Catholic activist, Theobald McKenna, who stated, 'I am induced ... to conclude against Revolutions in general and to submit to the evils I know rather than to embark on a course of desperate remedy, of which none can determine the end or consequences'.¹¹⁹ Finally, in strong opposition to Smyth's description of a 'campaigning partner of the Committee',¹²⁰ the leading United Irishman, William Drennan, has left an enlightening explanation of the relationship which he observed between himself, his own radical Society of United Irishmen, and the moderate Irish Catholic Committee.

¹¹⁶ Karen J. Harvey, *The Bellevs of Mount Bellew: A Catholic Gentry Family in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, pp. 170-1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, p. 237.

¹¹⁹ Theobald McKenna, *Political Essays Relative to the Affairs of Ireland, in 1791, 1792 and 1793* (London, 1794), pp. 171-2 [February 1793, 'An Essay on Parliamentary Reform, on the Evils Likely to Enue from a Republican Constitution in Ireland'].

¹²⁰ Jim Smyth, *The Men of the Property, Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*, p. 58.

William Drennan, who repeatedly bemoaned his own estrangement from the Catholic Committee, wrote in February 1792 that '[Richard Burke] and Keogh have kept as clear of the dissenters as possible' and I never yet saw Burke even in company and I never had but one visit from Keogh since he came over'.¹²¹ By the end of 1792 this situation had not improved markedly for in September Drennan claimed that, 'I know nothing of their [Catholic] councils – Tone is possessed of them all. They behave civilly to me but nothing more.'¹²² In December Drennan continued to complain that 'many in the convention dread us republicans and sinners and don't like to have much communication with us'.¹²³ These eighteenth-century statements challenge the significance of the role of the Society of United Irishmen within the Irish Catholic campaign as well as the existence of any major intra-organisational cooperation. Finally, it can be argued that Drennan managed to capture the actual nature of the relationship between the two organisations by explaining in November 1792:

They will make use of every means for success. They will negotiate on this side and on that side – They will make as many instruments as they can, they will send their sanguine men into our Society and the heads of their sect ... will stand back sullen and reserved.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Jean Agnew (ed.), *The Drennan – McTier Letters*, i (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1998), p. 397 [William Drennan to Sam McTier, 27 February 1792] & pp. 388-9 [William Drennan to Sam McTier, 3 February 1792].

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 414 [William Drennan to Sam McTier, 18 September 1792].

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 443 [William Drennan to Sam McTier, 8 December 1792].

¹²⁴ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 23 [25 November 1792].

III

Patriotic ?

A final framework for interpreting the Catholic Committee's political campaign involves adopting an alternative view of Irish Catholic political activism in the 1790s. Recent historians have tended to overlook the important and long-lasting alliance between Irish Catholics and Irish parliamentary reformers, such as Henry Grattan and the Irish Whig Party. In neglecting this line of enquiry, however, historians downplay the significant potential ramifications of the association and fail to ask the question: How was the Catholic campaign affected by its close connection to the reformist Irish Whig Party?

The tolerant and liberal views of Catholic activists in the 1790s permitted them to work closely with Protestant opposition MPs in the Irish parliament. Furthermore, while the Catholic Committee opposed extreme radicalism and violent revolutionary tactics, ultimately, they did support the patriotic cause of moderate parliamentary reform. This cause came to be inextricably linked to an Irish Whig belief in an extensive and corrupt British influence, acting through Dublin Castle and pervading the Irish parliament. Subsequently, it came to be associated with the patriotic desire for a reformed Irish legislature exerting control over the Irish executive in order to ensure a legitimate national government, a concern which acquired renewed vigour prior to the Irish Act of Union of 1800 whereby the Irish parliament was dissolved. An underappreciated, but crucial development in the Irish Catholic activism of the 1790s involved the adoption of this cause by the Catholic Committee and the subsequent growth and continuance of Irish Catholic patriotism.

The expansion of patriotism in Ireland had been closely linked to the American Revolution and the colonial contest with the British government over legislative authority and justice. This same conflict was mirrored in Ireland by the Irish Patriots in parliament and the popular Volunteer societies, who succeeded in reducing formal British influence over the Irish legislature and securing official Irish legislative independence in 1782. Irish Catholics played a limited role in these patriotic events in the 1780s by joining the Volunteer Organisations which welcomed them, but, ultimately, also contributing to the dissolution of the Volunteer movement, which became divided over the propriety of Catholic recruitment. John Keogh, Thomas Braughall and Richard McCormick all participated in Volunteerism and, subsequently, had early exposure to the cause of Irish patriotism.¹²⁵

This involvement, however, had little impact on the policies and objectives of the Irish Catholic Committee in 1790. Still largely under the influence of the Catholic gentry, patriotism was rarely evident in the Catholic Committee's early activities. Moreover, throughout 1791 the Catholic Committee remained distracted by secondary concerns and internal quarrels, including the Kenmarite schism and the heated debates over the *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin*. When national issues did appear in official Committee publications or resolutions in late 1791 or early 1792, they were used only to support the Catholic cause, employing the argument that Catholic relief would provide a national benefit. On 3 December 1791, the Committee stated that, 'we have reason to expect the assistance of all who wish well to their country' and, in February 1792, the Committee's petition to the Irish parliament argued that granting the franchise to Irish Catholics would 'strengthen the Protestant state, add new vigour

¹²⁵ E. O'Flaherty, 'The Catholic Question in Irish Politics, 1774-1793' (unpublished MA thesis, UCD, 1981), p. 105 & J. W. Hammond, 'Thomas Braughall, 1729-1803 Catholic Emancipationist', *Dublin Historical Record*, 14 (1956), 41.

to industry, and afford protection and happiness to the Catholics of Ireland'.¹²⁶ In the winter of 1792, therefore, the Catholic Committee was overwhelmingly concerned with the relief of the Catholics of Ireland and with the Catholic cause, taking little interest in unrelated, national causes such as Irish patriotism or parliamentary reform.

Although the Catholic Committee initially displayed little interest in political reform, other Irish activists strenuously promoted the patriot cause. In 1791, T. W. Tone insisted that 'the misfortune of Ireland is that we have no national government'.¹²⁷ He went on to claim that the 'foreign government in Ireland was maintained by profligate means and hence corruption is the only medium of government in Ireland'.¹²⁸ Similarly, the mainly Protestant Dublin Society of United Irishmen declared, 'we have no national government. We are ruled by Englishmen and the servants of Englishmen'.¹²⁹ Both Tone and the United Irishmen called for Irish unity between Protestants and Catholics in order to promote the cause of reform and to secure a representative and popular national government. These sentiments were also reflected by Theobald McKenna and the Catholic Society of Dublin, which stated:

It is time we should cease to be distinct nations, forcibly enclosed within the limits of one island ... Countrymen! too long have we suffered ourselves to be opposed in rival factions to each other, the sport of those who felt no tenderness for either.¹³⁰

In addition, McKenna displayed patriotic, national concerns in January 1791 by claiming that 'the independent Roman Catholic would form an admirable recruit to the

¹²⁶ R. D. Edwards (ed.), 'The Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773-92', *Archivium Hibernicum*, ix (1942), 139 & 153 [18 February 1792].

¹²⁷ T. Wolfe Tone, *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland, In Which the Present State of the Country, and the Necessity of a Parliamentary Reform are Considered ... [by] A Northern Whig* (Dublin, 1791), p. 11.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/34/32 [November 1791, 'At a Meeting of the Society of United Irishmen of Dublin'].

¹³⁰ *Declaration of the Catholic Society of Dublin* (Dublin, 1791), p. vi [dated 21 October 1791].

popular interest in counties' and that 'disfranchisement of the great body of the Irish people retards the cultivation and natural improvement of the island'.¹³¹

These popular expressions of patriotism were well represented within the Irish parliament by Henry Grattan and the Irish Whig Party. The Irish Whig Party had unofficially emerged after the Patriots in the Irish parliament had associated with the British Rockingham Whigs in 1782. These two groups were united in demanding limitations on the perceived dangerous influence of the executive over their respective legislatures. In Ireland, the Whig Party became an official opposition party in parliament in 1791, partly in response to the Regency crisis of 1789.¹³² The founding fifty-five members, pledging to reduce crown influence in Ireland, published the explanatory tract, *A Letter on the Nature and Tendency of the Whig Club and of the Irish Party*. This pamphlet explained that the Irish Whigs sought a more representative government for Ireland, elected by a wider body of Irish people and free from the control of a British ministry exerting a corrupt influence through the granting of pensions, peerages, sinecures and places: 'An administration truly Irish! Brought in upon the shoulders of a popular body, relying upon popularity for its support, secure, not by servility to a Lord Lieutenant, but a stern control over him'.¹³³ These views were reiterated during the Irish parliament of 1792 by leading Whig, Henry Grattan, who accused the Irish Lord Lieutenant of filling the Irish legislature with his own sycophantic placemen. Grattan insisted that 'the minister of Ireland ... has an interest opposite to the welfare of the country' and that the executive sought to 'establish the

¹³¹ Theobald McKenna, *A Review of the Catholic Question, in Which the Constitutional Interests of Ireland, with Respect to that Part of the Nation, are Investigated* (Dublin, 1791), p. 59.

¹³² D. Kennedy, 'The Irish Whigs, 1789-1793' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1971), pp. 55-61.

¹³³ [Henry Grattan,] *A Letter on the Nature and Tendency of the Whig Club and of the Irish Party* (Dublin, 1791), pp. 25-6.

corruption of the Irish [Parliament]'.¹³⁴ In this speech Grattan employed a descriptive metaphor to capture the condition of Ireland:

The history of nations is often-times a farce: What is the history of that nation that, having at the hazard of every thing dear in a free constitution, obtained its mistress, banishes the champion, and commits the honour of the lady to the care of the ravisher?¹³⁵

In the early 1790s as the Irish Whig Party exerted ongoing efforts in parliament to rally support for its cause and to secure the passage of specific legislation to accomplish its aims, the party also described the patriotic need for national 'union' among the diverse communities of Ireland as a necessary corollary, claiming: 'The angles of your contending religions are wearing away by *time*'.¹³⁶ The cause of Catholic relief, however, was not adopted by the Irish Whigs until 1792, after the Catholic Committee had risen to national significance and prominence. Before 1792, the Whig Party was divided over the issue with more conservative members voicing traditional concerns over the admission of Catholics to the parliamentary franchise. Moreover, during the Irish parliamentary session of 1792, the more sympathetic and liberal Irish Whig leaders decided not to adopt the Catholic cause, doubting the limited strength of their opposition party to pass the desired bill through parliament and secure significant Catholic relief.

In the immediate aftermath of the Irish parliament of 1792, however, Henry Grattan became convinced of the necessity of upholding the cause of the Irish Catholics. Grattan recognised the potential benefits to the reform cause to be gained by Catholic support and he preferred a Catholic-Whig alliance to an alliance between the

¹³⁴ *The Speech of Henry Grattan, Esq. on the Address to His Majesty, at the Opening of the Irish Parliament, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 14.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹³⁶ [Henry Grattan,] *A Letter on the Nature and Tendency of the Whig Club and of the Irish Party* (Dublin, 1791), p. 12.

Catholics and the Irish administration. Initially, therefore, although Grattan may have appreciated the justice of Catholic claims, the Catholic cause was adopted by certain members of the Irish Whig Party primarily to support their own cause of parliamentary reform:

The Whigs examined Catholic relief mainly from the two aspects of how it would affect the interests of the landed gentry and the future of Irish independence. They backed it in Parliament because they considered that in principle it favoured both ... The Whigs considered that the restoration of the people to the Constitution was a necessary corollary to their other major policy of restoration of the Commons to the people.¹³⁷

The Irish Whigs began to participate in the Catholic cause during the Irish parliamentary session of 1792. They were initially approached and asked by the Committee to present the petition to the Irish parliament that had been drafted by Richard Burke. According to Burke's description of events, however, 'Egan, a lawyer, was to have brought it in as a friend of Grattan's ... when the petition came to be shown to him and some of his friends, he proposed alterations in it, which, as a composition, entirely destroyed it'.¹³⁸ As a result of the Whigs' refusal to present Burke's original petition unaltered, Richard Burke turned to an alternate MP, Charles O'Hara, who failed miserably when attempting to present the petition to the Irish Commons on 25 January. The Irish Whigs were then recruited to assist the Catholic Committee in the creation of an acceptable petition, which was presented by Egan on 18 February 1792. In the heated parliamentary debates which followed the reception of this petition, Grattan, Curran, Egan, and their parliamentary associates spoke out against the slanderous, anti-Catholic remarks of certain Irish MPs and in defence of the Catholic Committee. Egan observed that the names on the Catholic petition were the

¹³⁷ D. Kennedy, 'The Irish Whigs, 1789-1793' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1971), p. 199.

¹³⁸ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 46 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke, 29 January 1792].

‘names of citizens amongst the most respectable in your metropolis, of traders amongst the most wealthy and important in your country’. ¹³⁹ Similarly, Henry Grattan insisted:

The first name to that petition [Edward Byrne] is one of the first merchants in Ireland. His credit would go further than the character of most of our modern courtier placemen: the others ... are men of property, respectability, of honest and useful application to extend your trade. ¹⁴⁰

Even Richard Burke was forced to acknowledge Grattan’s efforts on behalf of the Catholic Committee and the Catholic cause during the Irish parliamentary session of 1792: ‘I must do Grattan the justice to say, it was impossible to come forward, when he did come forward, with more manliness, vigour, honour, decision, and ability’. ¹⁴¹

This important new alliance between Irish Catholics and the Irish Whig Party was continued throughout the remainder of 1792. In the fourth volume of the *Memoirs of the Life and Times of ... Henry Grattan*, the claim is made that John Keogh ‘dined with opposition at Leinster House’. ¹⁴² Also contained in Grattan’s memoirs is a thorough description of the springtime meeting at Mr. Forbes’s house on Kildare Street between Keogh, Byrne, Grattan, Hutchinson, and Ponsonby, wherein the plan for a Catholic convention was first propounded: ‘the Catholics were frightened at the proposed measure and would hardly attempt it ... the party had some trouble in persuading them to come forward’. ¹⁴³

These close and consistent political connections are similarly captured in T. W. Tone’s Diary. Despite having conflicting obligations to travel to promote the Committee’s plan for elections, Tone has cited meetings between himself, Keogh and

¹³⁹ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, vol. 12 (Dublin, 1784-95), p. 197 [20 February 1792].

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 225 [20 February 1792].

¹⁴¹ P. J. Marshall and John A. Woods (eds.), *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, vii, 70 [Richard Burke to Edmund Burke, 23 February 1792].

¹⁴² Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Grattan on 21 July and 28 July 1792 as well as meetings involving himself, Devereux and Grattan between 25 and 28 August 1792. At these meetings a wide variety of tactics and potential obstacles were discussed, including the Committee's address to the Defenders and the possibility of government interference in the Catholic convention: '[Grattan] apprehends government will make a blow at the Catholics by committing their chairman ... Grattan advises to let him go and immediately elect another'.¹⁴⁴ During the August meetings Grattan expressed a further wish to hold all future communications on behalf of the Catholic Committee only with Tone. The politically adroit, insightful and calculated reason given for this decision was that:

If they were to hold personal communication, government would say they [the Irish Whigs] were agitators, inflaming the public mind and that, instead of their being the organ of the Catholic sentiments, the Catholics were only instruments in their hands; that the grievance of the Catholics would thereby be said not to be felt, but suggested by Grattan and his friends to answer the purposes of a faction.¹⁴⁵

Kennedy has stated that 'the Whig leaders successfully kept their promotion of the Catholic convention a closely guarded secret'.¹⁴⁶ This covert activity may explain the absence of any references to Grattan's Catholic Committee alliance in Castle correspondence, but it did not prevent the Irish Whigs from continuing to support the Catholic cause. These efforts were demonstrated by their efforts in Antrim, Down, Wexford, Waterford and Cork, where Kennedy has claimed that the Irish Whigs were responsible for sponsoring county resolutions in favour of Catholic enfranchisement, and at Westminster, where leading Irish Whigs supported the Catholic deputation in December 1792. Both Kennedy and the fourth volume of Grattan's memoirs note the

¹⁴⁴ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 165 [21 July 1792].

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, i, 178-9 [27 August 1792].

¹⁴⁶ D. Kennedy, 'The Irish Whigs, 1789-1793' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1971), p. 195.

presence of Grattan, Hutchinson and Curran at Westminster to meet with British ministers and 'to provide [the Irish Catholics] with advice and connections'.¹⁴⁷

This important and crucial assistance was made public during the Irish parliamentary session of 1793. Grattan famously spoke in support of the Catholic cause arguing that the Irish Catholic required the parliamentary franchise 'as essential to his civil and political liberty' and that 'the Catholic body in Ireland are now too important and too wealthy to be excluded from the franchises of the Constitution without an immediate injury to the public credit'.¹⁴⁸ These national concerns were also demonstrated by Grattan in arguing for Catholic relief as a means of strengthening the Constitution and achieving national unity: 'we have declared, we hope to be one people'.¹⁴⁹ Grattan also drew an association between Catholic relief and parliamentary reform by claiming that Protestant reformers and Irish Catholics had been 'united in opposition' and were viewed by Dublin Castle as equally 'disloyal'.¹⁵⁰ Parliamentary reform was also evident in the remarks of other Irish Whig MPs, including Ponsonby, who objected to the origin of the Relief bill at Westminster, but also linked Catholic relief to the cause of patriotic reform:

[The Catholics] are Irish, he said, and I am Irish; and with the prosperity or adversity of this, our common country, will I rise or fall ... I will never agree to sacrifice the rights or the interests of this, my native country, to the schemes of any English minister.¹⁵¹

Finally, Grattan provided the Irish Commons with a vivid description of the state of Ireland by asking, 'What was the case of Ireland, enslaved for a century, and withered

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 195 & Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the Life and Times of the Right Honourable Henry Grattan*, iv, 70.

¹⁴⁸ *The Speech of the Right Honorable Henry Grattan in the House of Commons, Friday, February 22, 1793, on the Catholic Bill. Also, Mr. Grattan's Reply to the Right Honorable Speaker, Wednesday, February 27, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 34.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁵¹ *The Parliamentary Register, or History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland, 1781-95*, 13 (Dublin, 1784-95), 62 [14 January 1793].

and blasted with her Protestant Ascendancy like a shattered oak, seethed on its hill by the fires of its own intolerance?' ¹⁵²

While Patriotic Whig reformers in the Irish parliament were adopting and incorporating Catholic concerns into their political objectives, Catholic activists also gradually acquired an appreciation of the cause of patriotic reform. In the early months of 1792 several Irish Catholic leaders continued to justify Catholic relief as a national benefit. At the Dublin Catholic meeting on 23 March 1792, Hugh Hamill claimed that the relief of the Catholics of Ireland was 'interwoven with the general prosperity of the country', while Randall MacDonnell described it as a benefit to the nation: 'give freedom to the Roman Catholics, and they will become a numerous and prosperous tenantry'. ¹⁵³ In the Committee's plan for elections, circulated throughout Ireland in May 1792, it was predicted that the granting of the parliamentary franchise would 'contribute to raise a respectable yeomanry in the kingdom ... giving on the one hand a new infusion of vigour to the commonwealth'. ¹⁵⁴ In that same month, Theobald McKenna also explained, 'I enter into this subject not of a party question, in which one class alone is interested, but of a great national concern and involving the fate not of the Catholics, but of Ireland'. ¹⁵⁵ Finally, these issues were demonstrated by the Catholics of Waterford, who claimed that 'the nation must flourish in proportion as the privileges of equitable and rational liberty are diffused among its inhabitants'. ¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² *The Speech of the Right Honorable Henry Grattan in the House of Commons, Friday, February 22, 1793, on the Catholic Bill. Also, Mr. Grattan's Reply to the Right Honorable Speaker, Wednesday, February 27, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 31.

¹⁵³ *A Report of the Debate which Took Place at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at the Music-Hall, Fishamble Street, Friday, March 23, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ *At a Meeting of the Sub-Committee of the Catholics of Ireland, Edward Byrne, Esq. in the Chair, Resolved - that the Following Letter be Circulated on May 26, 1792* (Dublin, 1792) [single sheet only].

¹⁵⁵ Theobald McKenna, *Political Essays Relative to the Affairs of Ireland, in 1791, 1792 and 1793* (London, 1794), p. 8 [5 May 1792, 'Preface to the Second Edition of Constitutional Interests'].

¹⁵⁶ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/34/68 ['A Declaration of Political Sentiments Published by the Roman Catholics of the City and Vicinity of Waterford in Answer to the Resolutions Entered into by the Different Grand Juries at the Summer Assizes, 1792'].

These undeveloped expressions of general concern for the national prosperity of Ireland evolved rapidly between the closing months of 1792 and the opening months of 1793. The unexpected and alarming arrival of anti-Catholic resolutions from county Grand Juries in the summer of 1792, quickly led Irish Catholic activists to adopt a belief in an obstructionist and self-interested Irish executive, willing to resort to corrupt and unjust methods to retain its monopoly of power at Dublin Castle. This frustration with and opposition to the Irish administration, therefore, more closely resembled the cause of Irish reformers, who were also committed to restraining the encroaching Irish executive and defending the parliament of Ireland. These philosophical developments occurred concurrently with the rapid politicisation and political reawakening of Catholic Ireland, events which greatly contributed to the Catholic Committee's increasing interest in the cause of patriotic reform.

In the closing months of 1792, Catholic activists began to adopt and express this new patriotic language. At the Dublin Catholic meeting on 31 October 1792, Randall MacDonnell celebrated the efforts of his 'illustrious friends in both Houses of Parliament' and the popular 'patriotic Societies'.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, John Keogh described the 'manly and patriotic sentiments expressed' on that day, as well as asking the assembled spectators, 'are not the true patriot Protestants with us?'¹⁵⁸ He described the monopolist faction entrenched at Dublin Castle as: 'enemies to us and enemies to Ireland' before proclaiming that 'every man interested in his country by property, children, or patriotism must feel indignant at the avowed determination to continue three or four millions of people in slavery.'¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, duly convened on Wednesday, October 31, 1792*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38 & 42.

During the Catholic convention in December 1792, Catholic activists with radical sympathies, such as W. J. MacNeven, spoke to the assembled delegates telling them that 'your cause is not simply that of Catholics, it is the cause of Ireland, and every patriot is your ally ... First they endeavoured to divide you against each other, and that was the dawn of union'.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, moderate Catholics, including J. E. Devereux, rallied support and electrified the convention by describing the anti-Catholic faction as 'the enemies of Ireland. The present administration has not the confidence of the people'.¹⁶¹ Finally, in the anonymous pamphlet, *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate*, the author described the Catholic convention's decision to request total emancipation as 'a patriotic measure' that was intended 'to cement a union of sentiment, by removing a diversity of interest'.¹⁶²

These gradual advancements by Irish Catholic leaders at incorporating national and patriotic issues into their political campaign ultimately resulted in official expressions of support for parliamentary reform in 1793. The moderate Catholic activist, Theobald McKenna, stated in February that, although he was forced 'to conclude against revolutions', he was avowedly in favour of reform:

¹⁶⁰ *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, with the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 15.

¹⁶¹ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 82.

¹⁶² *A Brief Account of the General Meeting of Catholic Delegates Held in Dublin, December 1792, by a Delegate, with the Speeches of Doctors McNeven and McDermot* (Dublin, 1793), p. 4.

If we could reconcile to ourselves to set aside the religious denomination, to call the Catholic enfranchisement, reform, and to consider it merely as adding a number of independent men to the body of electors, we should perceive this measure nearly adequate to remove the defect. ... let me be understood not to deny, that the influence of the people in Parliament ought to be enlarged, and that the extension of this influence is extremely compatible with the proper balance of power necessary to be preserved in order to avert the evils of Republicanism.¹⁶³

Following the successful passage of the Catholic Relief Act of 1793, which had been accompanied by the outspoken support of the Irish Whig reformers in parliament, the General Committee of the Catholic Committee reassembled in April 1793 and also expressed support for the cause of parliamentary reform. According to Tone's Diary, radical Committee members were joined by moderates in calling for reform. Hugh Hamill insisted that the 'principle of reform [was] recognised by parliament' and that it was 'not disrespectful'.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Dr. Ryan urged his Catholic associates, 'if you lay down the Catholic question, you must take up that of reform ... If you dissolve you must speak for reform'.¹⁶⁵ According to Tone the result of a vote advocating the cause of reform was overwhelmingly positive, with most Committee members, including MacNeven and Sweetman, supporting a pro-reform resolution and few Committee members, such as Sir Thomas French, remaining opposed to the measure. This is supported by the Committee's official publication, *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793*, wherein, immediately prior to dissolving, the Catholic Committee publicly proclaimed:

¹⁶³ Theobald McKenna, *Political Essays Relative to the Affairs of Ireland, in 1791, 1792 and 1793* (London, 1794), pp. 169 & 174 [February 1793, 'An Essay on Parliamentary Reform, and on the Evils Likely to ensue from a Republican Constitution in Ireland'].

¹⁶⁴ William T. W. Tone (ed.), *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone, Founder of the United Irish Society*, i, 265-6 [April 24 1793].

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

We do most earnestly exhort the Catholics of Ireland to cooperate with their Protestant brethren in all legal and Constitutional means, to carry into effect that great measure ... A reform in the representation of the people in the Commons House.¹⁶⁶

Within the course of the three years 1791 to 1793, the Catholic Committee and the Catholic activists of Ireland had become increasingly politicised. Thomas Bartlett has acknowledged this phenomenon, stating, 'the public signing of petitions, the calling of a convention, the sending of delegates to London – all had their impact on Catholic consciousness'.¹⁶⁷ As these developments took place, Catholic leaders became more aware of the conditions within Ireland, moving away from provincial and purely Catholic concerns and, gradually, taking a greater interest in the national welfare of Ireland. This movement was additionally accompanied by the extreme opposition of Dublin Castle and the invaluable assistance of Irish Whig Party reformers, who encouraged the Irish Catholic Committee to build a strong alliance with parliamentary opposition while seeking a restraint on the power of the Irish executive. Although, therefore, Marianne Elliott has correctly asserted that 'eighteenth-century Catholic culture ... was not particularly anti-government and was entirely antithetical to the notions of democracy and individual rights unleashed by the French Revolution,'¹⁶⁸ the Catholic leaders in the Catholic Committee did, ultimately, adopt the legal, constitutional and pacific cause of moderate, patriotic parliamentary reform started by Grattan and the Irish Whig Party several years earlier.

This important and unprecedented alliance survived for several years afterwards. Between 1793 and 1795, Irish Whigs and Catholic leaders reinforced their association through both political and social activities. For example, by 1793 John

¹⁶⁶ *Proceedings of the General Committee of Roman Catholics of Ireland, which Met on Tuesday April 16, and Finally Dissolved on Thursday April 25, 1793* (Dublin, 1793), p. 11.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation, The Catholic Question, 1690 – 1830*, p. 172.

¹⁶⁸ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster, A History*, p. 237.

Keogh 'had begun receiving and accepting regular invitations to dine and consult with the opposition'.¹⁶⁹ At one particular dinner thrown by a Catholic leader in honour of Lord Moira 'the diners ... celebrated their parliamentary guests with ostentatiously pro-Whig and loyal toasts – to Grattan, Ponsonby, Doyle, Forbes and Knox, to *the Duke of York and the army* and to *the Constitution in King, Lords and Commons*'.¹⁷⁰ This cooperation was also evident in the months prior to the arrival of Earl Fitzwilliam.

The appointment of Earl Fitzwilliam to the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland in Dublin Castle heralded a great triumph for the Irish Whigs. It also held great promise for Catholic activists, who anticipated the final reward of total emancipation. These political allies, therefore, worked in concert to achieve their aims prior to and during the Fitzwilliam administration, which lasted for less than two months between January and February 1795. John Keogh has explained these intimate political ties, emphasising 'the importance of being supported by Mr. Grattan's abilities, together with the influence he is expected to have in the new administration':¹⁷¹

Some of our bitterest enemies are declining in power, and gentlemen who in 1793 voted for total emancipation are to be in the counsels and confidence of Earl Fitzwilliam. A deputation of Catholics waited upon Mr. Grattan on Sunday, 21 December [1794]. He agreed to present and support the enclosed petition.¹⁷²

Earl Fitzwilliam's unexpected recall, by 23 February 1795, also united the frustrated and disappointed Irish Catholics and the Irish Whigs in outspoken opposition to the measure. On 27 February, the Catholics of Dublin presented an address of thanks to recognise Grattan's personal efforts on behalf of the Catholic cause. In this address,

¹⁶⁹ Danny Mansergh, *Grattan's Failure: Parliamentary Opposition and the People in Ireland 1779-1800*, p. 168.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁷¹ John O'Donovan, *The O'Conors of Connaught, an Historical Memoir*, p. 323 [Keogh to Owen O'Connor, 3 January 1795].

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Grattan was called 'the deliverer of his country' and it was also stated that, as promoter of the recent bill for Catholic emancipation, he was 'endeavouring to inculcate the necessity of moderation and justice'.¹⁷³ The Catholics of Dublin, which included Braughall and Sweetman, then proclaimed: 'we have no selfish or narrow views' and that 'some enemy ... to the King and to the people has interposed his malignant suggestions'.¹⁷⁴ The address went on to express outrage over Fitzwilliam's removal, simultaneously alluding to a new spirit of united, patriotic sentiment in Ireland:

Never before did Ireland speak with a voice so unanimous – Protestants and Catholics are at this moment united and seem to have no other contest but who shall resent most the outrage that has been offered to Irish pride, in the intended removal of a patriotic viceroy from the government - and you and your friends from the councils of this kingdom.¹⁷⁵

Grattan responded passionately to this Catholic address of gratitude by protesting against, 'the return to power of your old taskmasters' and claiming that, 'It is not your cause only, but that of the nation'.¹⁷⁶

This united patriotism was also evident on 9 April 1795, at another meeting of the Catholics of Dublin held at the Francis Street chapel and, according to eyewitness accounts, attended by over 5, 000 people including 'many respectable Protestants ... and hitherto utterly unprecedented, a great portion of those members of the university'.¹⁷⁷ John Sweetman, W. J. MacNeven, Doctor Ryan, John Keogh, and Edward Byrne were also all present at this meeting wherein powerful denunciations were made regarding Earl Fitzwilliam's recall. John Keogh spoke of the recent failure

¹⁷³ *Address of the Catholics of the City of Dublin, to the Right Honorable Henry Grattan, Presented by the Gentlemen Appointed for that Purpose at the Meeting in Francis Street Chapel, February the 27th, 1795* (Dublin, 1795) [single sheet only].

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Authentic Statement of the Proceedings of the Roman Catholics of Dublin, April 9, 1795* (London, 1795), p. 1.

of further Catholic relief and described events in Ireland after 1793, claiming, 'this was the moment seized upon to disappoint us and dash the cup from our lips'.¹⁷⁸ He then went on, however, to celebrate the new spirit of Irish unity which had arisen as a result of Fitzwilliam's recall: 'the nation was united and, for the first time, Irishmen were one people'.¹⁷⁹

These patriotic statements expressed on 9 April 1795, however, were followed by never-before-seen expressions of Irish Catholic nationalism and radical, anti-English prejudice, that were novel among Irish Catholic activists. John Keogh explained that 'a late publication ... of part of the correspondence supposed to be between Earl Fitzwilliam and one of his Majesty's ministers has torn away that veil that was before thrown over the influence of British ministers in the affairs of Ireland'.¹⁸⁰ This formerly moderate Catholic leader described this British 'interference' in Ireland as 'barefaced and avowed'.¹⁸¹ In addition, historically radical Catholic speakers, such as W. J. MacNeven, stated that 'a power that is foreign and hostile to both [Protestants and Catholics] would, for its own purposes, retain us in different conditions'.¹⁸² MacNeven claimed that England had fostered antipathy among the communities of Ireland to keep them distracted, divided and disorganised 'that thus the people ... may not have time, or power, or inclination to achieve anything for Ireland'.¹⁸³ He then celebrated the new 'spirit of harmony and cooperation which pervades all sects and descriptions of Irishmen'.¹⁸⁴ MacNeven called the English 'a calculating race', finally demanding and championing the new cause of Irish nationalism:

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

The moment is at hand when the world shall know how to estimate the connection of both countries, and the independence of our state ... The problem will be now resolved, whether Ireland is a free and imperial nation or only an outlying province to Great Britain. Without her we would have had an equal destiny with some of the most respectable nations in Europe ... until she was ruined by English protection.¹⁸⁵

Before 1795, Catholic activists had never made public, anti-British statements and rarely objected to the involvement of British officials in Irish politics as illegitimate. Therefore, although the Protestant speaker, Major Edward Sweetman of Wexford, had displayed radical anti-British attitudes in September 1792 when stating that 'the English began their system of calumny against the Irish, not before they began to despoil them',¹⁸⁶ contemporary Irish Catholic activists were instead seeking to encourage the assistance of British politicians and to raise support for the Catholic cause. In March 1792, John Keogh had asked, 'we wish for liberty united with empire. Have you heard in public or in private any idea of separation from England? - (Cry - No - No - No!)'.¹⁸⁷ In October 1792, he once again asked an assembled audience, 'Do we wish a separation from the empire or from England? (a number of voices cried out - no - no - no!)'.¹⁸⁸ During that same month the Catholics of Galway publicly condemned any threat to 'the fortunate connection of the sister kingdoms',¹⁸⁹ while, in December 1792, the Irish Catholic Committee officially pronounced that they were 'attached to the connection with Great Britain, because they feel the benefits of that

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁸⁶ *The Speech of Edward Sweetman, Captain of a Late Independent Company at a Meeting of the Freeholders of the County of Wexford Convened by the Sheriff in September of 1792 to Take into Consideration Mr. Edward Byrne's Letter, Recommending a Plan of Delegation to the Catholics of Ireland in Order to Prepare a Humble Petition to the Legislature* (Dublin, 1792), p. 15.

¹⁸⁷ *A Report of the Debate which Took Place at a General Meeting of the Roman Catholics of the City of Dublin, Held at the Music-Hall, Fishamble Street, Friday, March 23, 1792* (Dublin, 1792), p. 17.

¹⁸⁸ *Proceedings at the Catholic Meeting of Dublin, duly convened on Wednesday, October 31, 1792*, p. 47.

¹⁸⁹ Francis Plowden, *An Historical Review of the State of Ireland* (London, 1813), p. 196 ['Galway Roman Catholics at a Numerous and Respectable Meeting of the Roman Catholic Inhabitants of the Town and County of Galway, October 14, 1792'].

connection'.¹⁹⁰ Throughout 1792, therefore, Irish Catholic leaders had maintained respect and loyalty for the British government and had failed to express any desire for separation from Great Britain.

While the Catholic Committee was actively seeking British political support to counteract the obstructionist policies of Dublin Castle and was publicly promoting the traditional connection between Ireland and Great Britain in 1792, certain Irish Catholic activists did privately display their early opposition to a proposed legislative union between the two kingdoms. On 2 October, John Keogh demonstrated this patriotism by stating:

No party here ventures to adopt the idea of an union – It appears as if thrown out to sound the people. A certain gentleman observed to me that our Committee might address the English parliament on their grievances. Whether this sentiment was accident or design, it proved him not qualified to be in our secret councils, however, these attempts should only put us on our guard.¹⁹¹

Three years later, this Irish patriotism re-emerged and was joined by the frustrated alienation caused after Keogh and the other Catholic activists had learned of the disturbing English involvement in Earl Fitzwilliam's dismissal. At this point, they maintained their patriotism, while adopting a more radical attitude, defending Ireland's right to an unobstructed, representative, national government and legislature, and denouncing British interference 'in the affairs of a country, said to be independent'.¹⁹² On 9 April 1795, Dr. Ryan explained that 'Catholic emancipation is a desirable object

¹⁹⁰ *Vindication of the Cause of the Catholics of Ireland, Adopted, and Ordered to be Published by the General Committee, at a Meeting Held at Taylor's Hall, Back-Lane, December 7, 1792* (Dublin, 1793), p. 10.

¹⁹¹ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, H. O. 100/38/275 [Keogh to Hussey, 2 October 1792].

¹⁹² *Authentic Statement of the Proceedings of the Roman Catholics of Dublin, April 9, 1795* (London, 1795), p. 2 [John Keogh].

but the independence of your country is an object of much more value'.¹⁹³ He encouraged the Catholic members of his audience to 'abandon the pursuit of your own particular question' and to replace it with the newly generated interest in Irish independence, explaining to the onlookers that 'nations that are separated by nature are made for independence, and not for union'.¹⁹⁴ This sentiment was further supported by a final speaker at the Dublin Catholic meeting, Mr. Lewins, who claimed that, 'Catholic emancipation must contribute to render Ireland what she ought to be – Independent – in reality as well as in name'.¹⁹⁵

The Irish Catholic Committee's closest and most consistent ally between 1792 and 1795 was the Irish Whig Party, an association which contributed to the Committee's eventual public support for moderate parliamentary reform on the eve of its dissolution in April 1793. In the months following this dissolution, as conditions deteriorated in Ireland, Catholic activists continued to work closely with Henry Grattan and the Irish Whigs to accomplish their mutual aims of Catholic emancipation, a reformed parliament, and an Irish executive accountable to the Irish Parliament. Similarly, Catholic Ireland and the Irish Whigs suffered equally after Earl Fitzwilliam's recall. Moderate popular and parliamentary activists became ineffective and marginalised by the end of the century as Irish society became ever more polarised and Catholic and Protestant radicals assumed a leading role in opposing the Irish administration at Dublin Castle through increasingly violent and unconstitutional methods. The alliance between moderate Catholics and liberal Irish MPs, however, survived the dramatic events between 1795 and 1800, as exemplified by Henry Grattan's continued efforts on behalf of the Irish Catholics after 1800 and demonstrated

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 36.

by the words of J. E. Devereux in 1801, who continued to describe Grattan as 'the glorious deliverer of Ireland'.¹⁹⁶

The future emergence of Irish Catholic nationalism may also have been partly the result of the Irish Whig – Catholic Committee alliance. Throughout the 1790s, the newly politicised Catholics of Ireland were strongly influenced by their most important supporters, the Irish Whig Party, and were exposed to its repeated accusations against the corrupt involvement of British ministers in the government of Ireland. The Fitzwilliam debacle may have provided these Catholic activists with proof, supporting the claims of Whig Party leaders and weakening Irish Catholic loyalty to the British government. Although the Irish Whig Party officially advocated maintaining the connection between the two kingdoms 'through the King',¹⁹⁷ their ongoing, patriotic campaign for reform and popular government may have encouraged the growth of a more radical nationalism, which was subsequently adopted by certain Irish Catholics at the dawn of their national political reawakening.

In discussing the case of nineteenth-century Germany, William Carr has provided defining statements about the emergence of modern nationalism, claiming 'it is the element of popular participation which differentiates modern nationalism from what is sometimes termed *proto-nationalism*'.¹⁹⁸ If this definition can be applied to Ireland, then the Irish Catholic adoption of the cause of nationalism in the 1790s inaugurated the birth of modern nationalism in Ireland, while the Irish Whig Party may have represented the *proto-nationalists*, who planted the seeds for popular Irish nationalism to grow. Additionally, Carr has stated 'the nationalist phenomenon emerged at a time

¹⁹⁶ James Edward Devereux, *Observations on the Factions Which Have Ruled Ireland; on the Calumnies Thrown upon the People of the Country, and the Necessity of Restoring to the Catholics Their Political Rights* (London, 1801), p. 98.

¹⁹⁷ [Henry Grattan,] *A Letter on the Nature and Tendency of the Whig Club and of the Irish Party* (Dublin, 1791), p. 27.

¹⁹⁸ William Carr, *The Origins of the Wars of German Unification* (London: Longman, 1991), p. 2.

of intense social, economic change which could not be accommodated within existing power structures', ¹⁹⁹ a statement which is highly applicable to the condition of the moderate Irish Catholic activists, who found themselves frustrated by failed attempts to gain political and social equality in the 1790s. The biased, but potentially insightful observations of an eighteenth-century eyewitness, Lord Chancellor FitzGibbon may provide support for the premise that the Irish Whig Party permanently altered the Irish Catholic movement, first by emphasising the need for parliamentary reform and then, ultimately, by unintentionally encouraging the growth of Irish Catholic nationalism:

from the year 1782 to this hour, the policy of men who call themselves the friends of the people has been, to make Ireland a scene of embarrassment to the British Government; and to lose no opportunity which they could embrace to foment jealousies and disunion between this country and Great Britain. The policy has been upon every occasion to hold up Great Britain to the people, as their natural rival and enemy and to teach them to believe that the general interests of the empire must in every instance be sacrificed to the local advantages of Ireland; 'till at length they have raised a general outcry against English influence and English connection, ... and the *present wise and temperate system* of Irish policy is, to concentrate the force of Irishmen of all religions and descriptions against both. The avowed object at this day, of Irish reformers and Catholic emancipators is separation from Great Britain, and if they shall succeed in their hopeful projects, separation or war must be the inevitable issue. ²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁰⁰ *The Speech of the Right Honorable John Lord Baron FitzGibbon, Lord High Chancellor of Ireland, Delivered in the House of Peers on the Second Reading of the Bill for the Relief of His Majesty's Roman Catholic Subjects, March 13, 1793 (Dublin, [1793]), pp. 13-14.*

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